

1509/31.

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S E R M O N S.

BY THE LATE REVEREND
WILLIAM FLETCHER, L.L.D.

Dean of KILDARE, and Rector of St. MARY's, DUBLIN.



DUBLIN:
THOMAS EWING,
MDCCLXXII.

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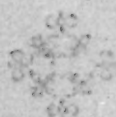
S E I O N S.



BY THE LATE REVEREND

WILLIAM FLETCHER, F.L.D.

IN TWO VOLUMES, THE SECOND OF WHICH IS THE SECOND EDITION.



DUBLIN:

THOMAS SWINSON.

MDCCLXXII.

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S E R M O N I.

R o m. vi. 21.

*What fruit had ye then in those things,
whereof ye are now ashamed?*

WE need not have recourse to the context for the occasion of the words: They are plain enough in themselves. It is evident from them, and from large experience, that Sinners in general come sooner or later to behold what they have done, in a very different light from what they were wont to do, and to be ashamed of their evil actions; but chiefly at these several periods:

B

FIRST,

FIRST, Immediately after the commission of Sin. SECONDLY, Upon some awakenings of Grace, which at times are vouchsafed to us all. But, THIRDLY, and more especially, at the hour of death.

Now Sinners come to behold what they have done in a very different light, FIRST, immediately after the Sin is committed.

It is one of the characteristics of Sin, that it is deceitful; not only as it betrays men into one measure of guilt after another; but in respect to the manner in which it treats it's votaries, by placing all the pleasure, all the profit, in front; and keeping it's sad reverse of mortification, distaste, compunction and shame, quite out of sight. For, no two things can differ so widely from each other, as a man doth from himself when in pursuit of his Sin, and the instant he hath committed it. For the truth of this I might appeal to many hearts. For, in the first place, his thoughts are so full of the object of his desires, and the gratification it will yield, as to exclude every higher and better consideration: But when the end is obtained all this vanish-

es



es in an instant, and a thousand avenging reflections rush in, and take their place. A tide of pleasure bears the man on, and then retires, and leaves him to himself, in a most abject and dispirited condition. A passion, whether for unlawful gain or pleasure, blinds those eyes, which, the moment it is gratified, are opened again. This was the first fruit of Sin. When our first parents had transgressed, it is said, that their eyes were open'd; by which must be understood a sudden and instant conviction of their folly and ingratitude. So soon did Sin shew itself; so early a discovery did it yield to the unhappy adventurers, of its being quite different in the issue from what it had promised them. Never was a scene so instantly shifted, as that from offending to repenting; from an eagerness to transgress, to an horror and distaste upon finishing the transgression.

Another period, when men behold their Sins and Follies in a different view from what they were wont to do, is,

SECONDLY, Upon some extraordinary awakenings of Grace, which at times are vouchsafed to us all. It was an early declaration

tion of the Almighty, that his spirit should not always strive with man; from whence we may infer, that, at times, it doth so; and from the Apostle's phrase, which we frequently meet with, of being *renewed in the spirit of our minds, of the inner man being renewed*; and from the Psalmist's words. *Renew a right spirit within me*, it follows pretty evidently, that this spirit is given us at times, but is apt to remit of its power, to slacken, and to require renewing, repairing, and strengthening. This is the case at various times, and in different measures, with every man: Nor is there any man so abandoned to his vices, as not to have perceived, at times, the spirit of God striving with him; some awakenings of Grace calling him home to himself, enlightening his mind and judgment, and setting his Sins before him in their proper colours; so as to make him hate and abhor them for the time, to sicken at the view, and to form new and better purposes for the future. These awakenings are renewed from time to time, as seemeth best to God's wisdom and goodness; and every Sinner, while under the influence of them, hath so penetrating

trating a sense and conviction of his folly, as to bear testimony against himself, in the words of my text, *What fruit had I then in these things, whereof I am now ashamed?* For, if any one man, who is conscious of no especial pretension to God's goodness and regard; nay, that he hath removed himself far out of the way of such fatherly indulgence; if such a one hath at times perceived the Spirit of God striving with him, and bringing him off from his former blindness and straying, no conclusion can be more reasonable, than that the same goodness and condescension, in such a manner as Divine Wisdom seeth fit and proper, is vouchsafed to every man whatsoever. And I doubt not, but every person, capable of thought and reflection, who should be asked the question, would answer in the affirmative; and that he has had such a light cast upon him by Divine Grace, as to make him turn aside from them with such a measure of shame and abhorrence, distaste and self-contempt, as to beget in him new and better thoughts, purposes, and practices, be they of longer or shorter duration.

The

The Grace of God, in these cases, operates sometimes immediately by itself, and awakens conscience: At other times, by natural means, and outward accidents; and hath many ways of bringing people to a right mind: Among others, by removing those things which are apt to intercept a view of a man's self, and the condition he is in; as riches, health, strength, the favour and countenance of the world, together with the noise and bustle of it. For, when these are removed, the mind will fall, and have nothing to obstruct it's view. When wealth is gone, as it may by a thousand accidents, the world is gone too: And when an heir, the hopes of a family, expires, the high thoughts, and presumptuous reckonings, upon an endless name and posterity, sink at once; and when these outward objects are removed, the man must look inward; the glare of vanity, in which he lived, and which prevented his seeing himself as he is, is now dispersed. This cloud over his sight is providentially withdrawn, that the comparison between his past desires and pursuits, and the present state of his mind, may strike the stronger. For, while passion prevails, reason

son retires; but when the fit is over, she returns with more force and new powers, and takes ample revenge for the neglect, by setting in full view before men the emptiness, unprofitableness, and folly, as well as danger of their past proceedings, which they only, who have felt her remonstrances, can describe. Too many, indeed, content themselves with the pleasure that attends their Sin, or the profit which accrues from it, as a sufficient recompence for the hazard they run; or compliment themselves, at least, with this poor satisfaction, that they have gained something by it. But our Apostle is of a very different way of thinking; *what fruit had ye THEN*, says he, i. e. at the very time you committed it, if set against the remorse, vexation, and shame, which will probably be your portion, before you leave the world, and the fatal issue of it afterwards. So that he disallows them even the poor comfort which they had in sinning, and yet it was their ALL. Whenever, therefore, the Grace of God leads Sinners to reflect, it is in this light they must behold their conduct; and condemn themselves, not only for mistaking the value of the purchase, for giving up

up a greater profit for a less, but because the penance and dissatisfaction which follow so very close upon it, are such, that they have, in fact, no gain or profit upon it at all. But this will appear more especially and more powerfully

THIRDLY, At the hour of death, When I mention the hour of death, I would be understood to mean that space of time which immediately precedes that awful period, and is, I may say, within the precincts of it; and that is, when the flesh is shrinking from us, passion subsiding, and the world retiring. When these are withdrawn, the Soul hath a clear and uninterrupted view of it's past desires, pursuits, and actions. This, indeed, is equally the case both with bad and good; but with a very different effect. To the good, it is Heaven begun: To the bad, it is but the beginning of sorrow. The former may ask themselves this question, ' what loss have we sustain'd by our sobriety and integrity; by serving God, and submitting to his fatherly dispensations?' Whereas, my Text is a challenge to the latter; *What fruit had ye then in those things, of which ye are now ashamed?*

There

There are times, we know, when after passing some hours in scenes of entertainment, of gaiety, of jollity, and the like, nature has been able to hold out no longer; has been tired and exhausted; and, indeed, rather disgusted with looking back upon the scenes it has left. If this then be the case; if, upon such occasional yieldings of nature, the mind and judgment take their turn to act, and so powerfully too; how must it be when our whole frame is giving way once for all; when the things of this world are removing every hour to a further distance from us; when even its closest and dearest connexions, tho' last of all, desert us; and the flesh is every moment yielding to the Spirit; what can the mind, its memory, and judgment have, to exercise itself upon, but the remembrance of it's former doings? As no passions will remain to mislead; no interest to misrepresent things; no fallacy to palliate or excuse what has been done; when every past action must appear in it's proper colours; with what distaste and abhorrence must the Sinner turn away from the sight of his Sins? What self-indignation and contempt must torment him? What shame must cover him,
and

and make him cry out with unavailing remorse, *What fruit had I then in those things, whereof I am now ashamed!* Nay, even the Good, from the workings of a contrite Spirit, find some allay to their present comforts; some unpleasing mixture from the remembrance of many actions, which they wish undone; of many hours mispent; of many opportunities of adding to their approaching felicity unimproved and neglected: And, if it be so with these, how must it be with the wicked?

Some, indeed, who have had no thought, but for the world, go out of it in an insensible state, without feeling shame or remorse: but the more and more confounding will their shame and surprize be in the next life. God's anger against them, for their neglect and desertion of him, must be heavy enough; but their own anger against themselves must add weight and bitterness to it: nay, they will be, in some measure, their own executioners; their memory and reflection will be ministers of divine wrath upon themselves; and as the evil cannot now cease to be evil, so their remembrance of it must be everlasting too.

Having,

Having, then, shewn you, that Sinners come to behold what is past, in a very different light, **FIRST**, Immediately after the commission of Sin; **SECONDLY**, After some awakenings of Grace, which, at times, are vouchsafed to us all; And lastly, at the hour of death;

Suffer me to offer a few reflections from what has been said.

Fruit, in a moral sense, is the end and consequence of what we do. What a mortification, therefore, must it be, to find all we have been doing to be unprofitable; and, in proportion to it's being so, so much the more bitter the reflection. To live a life that brings no profit, is bad enough; but to lead a life that brings such bitter fruit with it, must be infinitely worse. To be toiling from morning to night, as the avaritious and the ambitious do, and in the end to be forced to confess, that they have been all along working against themselves, and against their best interests; and that, as wise as they conceived themselves to be, they have been labouring to destroy themselves, and have gone quite the contrary way to that where the true treasure and greatness lie;

lie ; what an utter loathing and detestation must such persons feel upon the review, more especially those who have passed their days in the foul ways of lust, and the pollutions of the flesh ; in defrauding others, and the like !

That hereafter such may have no excuse for persevering in evil, nature herself gives them frequent and sufficient warning, by the distaste that immediately overtakes an impure or unrighteous action ; a specimen of that bitter remorse and hatred which must await them at the last.

Those who *tarry long at the wine*, to drown reflection, are withdrawing themselves every hour from the benefit of that natural check and remonstrance, which most others feel, and go on in their Sin from day to day, till they come to open their eyes in another world, and to have the whole of their unhappy mistake and folly burst all at once upon their astonished minds, without the benefit of that abatement in point of guilt, and punishment, which may possibly be made to others, for that self-indignation and remorse, which they have undergone, upon the review of their Sins, in their latest moments.

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The fruits of the Spirit are Joy, Peace; and soon will the Sinner say, hereafter, But, what have I reaped? Have I joy? Have I peace? The time of harvest is, indeed, at hand; but, what are the fruits which I have reaped, and may expect to reap? If I had used pleasure or gain moderately and lawfully, I should have had the fruit of it in health and spirits then, and a chearful conscience now. But what had I then? Why, baseness and folly, or stupidity and wretchedness. And, what have I now? Daggers in my heart, and the avenger in my conscience; forebodings of worse to come. If I had learnt, from one false step, to amend my ways, and followed the advice which nature and conscience gave me, I might have availed myself even of my fault, and have brought forth fruits meet for repentance here, and reap'd the benefit of them both here and hereafter.

In truth, present pleasures are the seed plot of future shame, distress, and sorrow. The gratifications attending such self-indulgences are only circumstances accompanying those actions, not the fruit of them. What That will be cannot be fully known,
till

till near the time of harvest. The first fruit of any action is the good or evil arising from it, and the effect which it has upon the conscience; but the fullness thereof is what the mind will feel, at the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgment. The fruit of a thing is best discerned by comparing what we have gained with what we have lost, and if a man, after committing a Sin, be a worse man than he was before he committed it, what fruit hath he from what he hath done, or, *what is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own Soul?* In the mean time, no man can pretend ignorance in the case; for, before he attempted it, conscience interposed her protest against it; and no sooner is it done, than a conviction of the evil stareth us in the face. This is the consequence of Sin, in every single instance. How, then, must it be, when the scene is thrown quite back, and the whole presents itself to view, from first to last, to the astonished Sinner, and makes him cry out, *what fruit had I then in those things, whereof I am now ashamed?*

Think then all ye who look no further than to the satisfying your irregular passions and appetites, and content yourselves with

with what you poorly reap from them, what your feelings and reflections will be in that hour, when you shall sit in Judgement, and that too with the utmost clearness and impartiality, upon your past conduct, as a prelude to that final Judgement which must soon succeed. Could we now see what we shall be then, as plainly as we shall then behold what we are now, we should be very different creatures from what we are. But this would overbear all freedom of choice. We have sufficient evidence however, of our holding such inquest upon ourselves in our latest moments, from the power which conscience hath over us now upon any single transgression. For Conscience doth that but partially now, and under many disadvantages; but it's operations will be then unlimited and uncontrolled. It will make it's grand and final appeal to all mankind, be they more or less sinful, and with a power that cannot be withstood, in the words of my Text, *What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed?* For ashamed you will be, and killing will be the reflection, that while you thought yourselves to be reaping fruit from those empty delights or evil
evil

evil practices you have persisted in with incredible labour and unrequiting fatigue, you have according to the Prophet's expression, been *sowing the wind, and reaping the whirlwind*; have been toiling for that which satisfieth not, and which passeth away, and reaping only confusion, distraction, self indignation, and the other usual attendants upon an evil conscience on both sides of the grave.

Were we to look into those numerous and shining Assemblies, wherein the gay, the vain, the designing, the rapacious, the profligate, the prophane, and voluptuous are met together, each for their several purposes, against the persons, or fortunes of others; and were we to consider the same Assembly now so gay and busy, as arrived at that period of life, when all the splendors and tumults of it shall be over, when they shall behold themselves and their doings as in a glass, and be in the same situation with those we have been speaking of above, as deserted by the world, and delivered over to their own thoughts and reflections, how might we moralize upon this scene? We may suppose them speaking to themselves and to one another, with remorse at their hearts

hearts and confusion in their faces; *What fruit had we then in those things whereof we are now ashamed?*

Let us look into the world in general, and observe the various, unrighteous and unchristian ways, which so many take for accomplishing their several ends, be it pleasure, fame, or fortune. See them hurrying to and fro, this way and that, upon the prospect of reaping fruits from their labours and pursuits: but alas! they are not aware when the vigour of life shall be past, and *the evil days draw nigh*, what a different face of things will present itself to them. Then will their self-applause be changed into self-condemnation: Then will they be convinced, to use the prophet's words, that *They have been spending their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.*"

To conclude: The fruit of our actions is properly that recompence, whether good or evil, whether pleasure or pain, which will attend us in our latest moments.

Profit or Pleasure, though they are considered by the avaritious or voluptuous as their main end, are, as I hinted above, only circumstances of their Actions, not the

end and design of them. If therefore our hopes and expectations rest in these, and look no further, we are like travellers, who amuse themselves with the delights of the prospects on each side, and let the end of their journey, which ought to have been their chief care, drop out of their thoughts, and are displeased with themselves at last for having consumed their time so unprofitably and unwisely.

Let us reflect, that if pleasure or profit were to be the fruit and recompence of our actions here, there would not have been so many as there are strangers to them both. Let us remember, that whatever foretaste we may occasionally have of good or bad to come, *the time of Harvest* is not yet; that the days immediately preceding it will inform the sinner what he has to expect; will convince him in the Prophet's phrase, that he *has sowed iniquity and must reap vanity*; or, to use the words of St. Paul, *That they who have sowed to the Flesh, have of the Flesh reaped corruption; and that they who have sowed to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.* That the latter may be our lot, God of his infinite Mercy grant.

S E R M O N

SERMON II.

REV. xxi. 7, 8.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my Son. But the fearful shall have their part in the Lake which burneth with Fire and Brimstone, which is the second Death.

THESE words are part of what was revealed by the Holy Spirit to St. John concerning the things that were to come to pass in the latter days, or the day of Christianity. I mean not to take up your time by entering into the particular destination of this Prophecy, any farther than it concerns ourselves, and shall only observe, that beside the Fear-

ful, there are mentioned in this verse the Unbelieving and the Abominable, and Murderers, and Sorcerers, and Idolaters, and all Liars; but the character which takes the lead, and which I have singled from the rest for our present consideration, namely the Fearful, hath awakened doubts and misapprehensions in some weak and scrupulous minds, who are apt to consider themselves as pointed at in this place, and in danger of being comprehended in this number. To prevent or remove therefore all misapprehensions in the case, I purpose to shew you,

FIRST, who they are, that do not come within this character of the Fearful in my Text. And SECONDLY, who they are that do.

And FIRST, what is matter of constitution or natural complexion can have no merit or demerit in it, merely as such. The happiness of what is called good Spirits and a firm temper, though it lays the parties possessed of them under obligations for such advantages, conveys to them however no moral excellence or superiority above their brethren. So, on the other hand, fearfulness, which is natural and constitutional, can, as such,

such, have nothing in it sinful or blameworthy. Nay, it is rather a loss and inconvenience to a man, being often a let and hindrance to him in the prosecution of his secular interests. Nevertheless, through the grace of God, it may be one happy step towards their Spiritual improvement. Certainly it can never come under the character in my Text. There are weak minds and tender spirits, which are apt to misjudge both of God and themselves, counting of Divine Justice and their spiritual estate by too hard a measure; but if such a fearful Spirit be the effect of weakness, much more if it be an excess of virtue and goodness, it cannot be of the number in the Text, nor be counted worthy to rank with unbelievers, murderers, whoremongers, and the rest therein mentioned.

Again, there have been, and may be, some melancholy tempers, which either through a natural gloominess, or some accidental disorder of mind, looking only on the dark side of things, and attending to nothing but the evils of life, have first feared, then suspected, and at length been unhappily persuaded, that the Sovereign
Ruler

Ruler of the Universe is a malevolent Being, one that regards not right or wrong, and is so far from intending the good, that according to their mistaken notions he seems rather to delight in the miseries of his Creatures, and have been driven thereby into despair: Now if this dark state, this despair of God's favour, this unwarrantable dread of the Almighty, be the offspring of a mind, long and wholly addicted to the world, of a mind alienated by degrees from the light of life, from all Faith and Hope in the Divine Truth and goodness, it must unquestionably fall under the character of the Fearful in the passage before us. But if this be owing to a natural or accidental disorder of mind, doubtless it will meet with all gracious allowances at the hands of a good and merciful God. We hope likewise a better fate for the ignorant Heathen, with whom fear and dread constituted the greatest part of their religion; and the poor Indian, who cuts himself with knives and lances, in dread of that Being which he worships, and whom he considers as delighting in blood and cruelty, will however have much to plead in abatement of his error, nor be numbered

numbered with the fearful, the unbelieving, the abominable, or murderers in my text.

On the other hand, let it be remembered, that the servant in the Gospel, who hid his Lord's money, is called not only an unprofitable, but a wicked servant; for, in order to justify his unpardonable sloth and supineness, he pretended that he knew that his master was an austere man, reaping where he had not sown, and gathering where he had not strawed; that he was afraid, therefore, and went and hid his talent in the earth. This character was intended to prefigure too many in these latter days, who, not caring to take much pains, in making use of the means God had put into their hands, affect to entertain austere notions of their great Lord and Master, and to justify their not endeavouring to please him, by a hasty conclusion, or pretence, that it is impossible to do so.

Again, There are many Christians among us, who perceive, or suspect in themselves, a want of Faith, and, upon that score, labour under great dejection of Spirit. We meet with many of these, in our course of visiting the sick and weak. Now, a want of Faith, considering the abundant evidence

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we have, both natural and revealed, of the Divine Goodness, Veracity, Mercy, and Justice, must be a criminal defect in the first principles of Christianity; but the fear arising from a sense of such defect, can never fall within the character in the text, inasmuch as this fear, on account of our not having such Faith, implies a wish, at least, that we had. The want of Faith itself must be liable to punishment, considering the easy and obvious means we have neglected for the attainment of it; but our fears on that occasion will not, it being one step, though a very short and imperfect one, towards repentance.

Again, Fears arising even from an evil conscience, from a sense of guilt unrepented of, can certainly pretend to no merit; but then neither do they come within the character here condemned. The guilt itself will surely be punished, but the fear arising from it, as it hath torment of the most exquisite kind in this life, so we charitably hope it will be considered and allowed in part of the punishment due to Sin.

More might be urged to this point, would the time permit, but having shewn you thus far, at least, who they are that do not come under

under the character of the fearful in my text, I shall go on, in the SECOND PLACE, to shew you who they are that do.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my Son. This, you see, bears respect more immediately to the conduct of the first professors of Christianity; nor, indeed, to them only, but to all succeeding Christians to the end of time. *He that overcometh*, this implies that measure of spirit and perseverance which was necessary for acquitting themselves courageously and faithfully in their new commission. As by the fearful is intended, in opposition thereto, the want of a right measure of Faith, and a disinterested love of Christ, sufficient to withstand the terrors and temptations they were likely to encounter in the course of their Christian Function. Great need, indeed, was there of a firm faith and perseverance in those early days of tryal: But, as they lived so near the time of Christ's appearance, and saw, or were next to seeing, the miracles which he and his Apostles did, with other like advantages of their station, so, likewise, great were the obligations and incitements to stand fast
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in the evil day. But neither is the profession of the Gospel, in these latter days, so much at ease, as to require no great spirit or perseverance to uphold it, or walk worthy of it; nor, in truth, are our obligations and incitements to do so less, who have the accumulated evidence, assistance, and example of past ages, to direct and quicken us: However, if the danger be less, our obligation to do so is so much the greater. By the Fearful, then, as it respects ourselves or the present times, must be intended a Fearfulness, from principles of interest and self-love, to do what reason and conscience pronounce to be right. This I shall apply to four particulars. FIRST, The being afraid to countenance and maintain the cause and credit of Christianity. SECONDLY, To become an advocate for truth and right, when occasion requires. THIRDLY, To confront and oppose wickedness where we can. FOURTHLY, To do justice to the dictates of our own minds and judgments. And FIRST, one species of our own Fearfulness is, the being afraid to countenance and uphold the cause and credit of Christianity.

There are fewer enemies and more friends to both, at the bottom, or in respect to the real

real state of men's minds, than the present appearances of things may incline us to believe; for, as all is not essentially good, which seemeth to be so, so all is not essentially bad, though it carry the face of evil. The heart shall not be so far depraved, notwithstanding the behaviour of many may induce us to think so. This, however, I am far from intending as an apology for that visible disregard to Religion and the Service of God, to decency and good manners, in these holy places, which a fear of singularity, of becoming the jest of our company, of being esteemed less polite, and the like, betray many otherwise well disposed persons to give into. So far from that, that such unnatural compliances with a wicked fashion render them the more criminal in the sight of God, and the more contemptible in the account of true wisdom and good sense; and place them within the number of the Fearful in my text, in the company of unbelievers, idolaters, abominable persons, and the rest of the black tribe abovementioned, as fearing man more than God; as acting against conscience and common honesty; and postponing the honour of their Maker, and the benefits of a good example, to their own

own pitiful fears of suffering in the eye and opinion of others, whose praise, it is plain, they court more than the praise of God.

You may read in the second chapter of the first book of Samuel, what befel old Eli, when his sons *made themselves vile, by prophaning the service of the altar, and he restrained them not.* Instead of dealing with them as he ought to have done, he contents himself with saying to them, *Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil doings by all this people: Nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear; ye make the Lord's people to transgress.* You see, by the feebleness of his reproof, that he was under the restraints of fear, or some such unworthy passion. Wherefore, saith the Lord, *I said, indeed, that thy house and the house of thy father should walk before me for ever; but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me; for, them that honour me, I will honour, and they that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed.* i Sam. ii. A fear of incurring shame, by serving God and doing good, is being ashamed of Christ; and you know what sentence is denounced against that by Christ himself.

Again,

Again, Deserting the pure religion, in which we were bred, to embrace popery, or any other corrupt religion, or exchanging the genuine principles of Gospel Faith, for the corruptions of Deism, of any denomination, from an apprehension of drawing upon us the resentment or disfavour of those amongst whom we live, or upon whom we have formed any expectations, or of any other inconvenience whatsoever, is a species of fearfulness that comes within my text.

So, also, on the other hand, an adherence to any corrupt religion, against our better knowledge and conviction, from what knowledge soever that conviction come, whether from reading, conversing, or our own reflection, through fear of breaking with some old or advantageous connexions, of becoming less gracious in the eyes of our friends, companions, and the like, which has been, and is daily the case, must place us upon the same ground with the Fearful and the Lyars in the passage before us; inasmuch as through a mercenary and most wicked prevarication with God and our consciences, we deservedly partake of both characters.

A SECOND species of fearfulness condemned in my text is, That of being afraid of rising
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or standing up in defence of truth and right ; of rising up when occasion requires ; of rising up, i. e. appearing in the cause of truth and justice, without any immediate or necessary call, but that of conscience ; or of standing up in support thereof, when summoned thereto by our prince and country. How much the public suffers, by the frequent and notorious instances of both, I need not observe.

A man who withholds his testimony, where a matter of property is depending, through fear of hurting himself or his friend, or his party, or of favouring the interests of an enemy, or of one whom he is unwilling to serve, is in a direct combination against truth, and becomes a principal in a bad cause, though he doth not personally appear in it, and will be recompensed accordingly. How much more, if, from an apprehension of some damage being likely to accrue to their persons, family, or fortune, evidence be withdrawn or withheld, whereby murderers, disturbers of the public peace, and other offenders, escape justice ; or when, from a fear of opposing the sentiments of others, engaged in the same inquest with themselves, the having their persons in undue reverence, because of advantage, or

through

through an ill-timed awe and submission, some are wrought upon to acquit the guilty, and condemn the innocent, having as little of the Fear of God before their eyes, in judging offenders, as the offenders had themselves when they committed the crime! Such as these are the Fearful in my text, and may justly be rank'd with murderers, lyars, and other abominable persons there recited.

A THIRD species of fearfulness implied in my text, is, That which makes men backward to oppose and confront wickedness, when it is in their power to do so. I say, when it is in their power, because, in some circumstances, it may not be so, and it is one infelicity attending people of station and fortune, that, as they give one another credit, for what way of living they think proper, so are they out of the reach of those friendly and reasonable hints and admonitions, by which many others have been happily reclaimed from their evil courses, or prevented from embarking in them. But when it can be done, it is a debt we owe to God, and to each other, and is especially due from those who are invested with public power and authority. Even a Heathen will tell us, that, among the other passions, which ill become the

the breast of a magistrate, this of fearfulness is equally to be disclaimed. Indeed, for such as have the executive part of justice in their keeping, to proceed with a slack hand, and to make their own interest or convenience the measure of their determination and dealings to others, to explain away the law, and, for want of timely interposing, to suffer wickedness of any sort, whether profaneness, debauchery, riot, and the like, to escape unnoticed or unpunished, this is what is condemned in the text, and will fall under the sentence of that supreme judge, who is *no respecter of persons* himself, and will never allow it in those who derive under him.

Then, as to those whose profession regards things beyond this life, who are commanded to *reprove, rebuke, exhort*, where must they be found, who shrink from their duty, through an unbecoming awe and reverence of any man? Times and circumstances are, indeed, very unfavourable to the discharge of these duties, and an indiscreet compliance of too many with the freedoms, or what is softened by the name of pleasantries, of company, hath rendered it more difficult for others to do what their judgments tell them is right, and, by betraying the dignity of
their

their judgments tell them is right, and, by betraying the dignity of their office, hath almost annihilated their powers, and brought the function itself into contempt. These, likewise, are of the Fearful in my text; and it ought to be an apology for those who are engaged in the work of the ministry, if any thing that may look like sharpness or severity, should fall from this place: for, *woe unto us, if we preach not the Gospel of Christ; if we speak not boldly as we ought to speak.* In the mean time, the precept *to exhort our brethren, and not to suffer Sin upon them,* is of general obligation. So that, if a man know his neighbour, much more his friend or his brother, to be living in a state of adultery, fornication, &c. and dare not admonish him, for fear of his displeasure, or through a mistaken delicacy, and he who hears the prophane in our streets, and passes by without interposing a check, as far as he can, participates with the other in his crime, and aggravates the weight of his own guilt, by the addition of that of others; and can expect no other than to rank with the Abominable and others in my text. This extends, likewise, to frauds and treasons, and other like dangerous practices, of which both King and

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country

country have an indispensable interest and right in the discovery.

Another, and a FOURTH species of this Sin of Fearfulness, is, the being afraid to do justice to the dictates of our own minds and judgments.

This, indeed, may seem to be the foundation of this duty in general, and to include the rest; but I must observe, that, as there are many fair-spoken people, who are guilty of more wickedness than they are willing should be known, so are there many others, who are not so bad as they would be thought. This species of Fearfulness hath drawn numbers of weak and silly people into the vices of the age wherein they have lived. The refinements of this age have fully proved the charge upon the present times.

Among the numerous parties, the chiefs of which meet together, like sharks for their prey, many there are, who, for fear of being shut out of good company, are tempted to stake their present peace, their future provision, nay, and that of their children too, at a reigning diversion, for which, perhaps, they have neither sufficient spirit, skill, or fortune;

Many

Many who have neither constitution, taste, or inclination for drinking, have yet been drawn in to drink, and go mad with the rest; and what is all this for? Why, in case of a refusal, for fear of not being admitted to the honour and privilege of doing the like again at another time.

There are others who having got it into their heads, that, to be good and pious is to be insignificant, and that, to behave in public conformably to the Christian character, is much below the spirit and elegance of high life; for fear, therefore, of being thought good and religious, affect appearances of irreligion and irreverence: Such, however, will do well to remember, that they are in great danger of being distinguished, one day, from the good and virtuous, by the most palpable difference; and of falling into the worst company, both in this world and the next, namely, the unhappy characters in the context.

To sum up the whole, by way of application:

You see then, that by Fearfulness here mention'd, is not intended a timorousness of constitution, or a Fearfulness occasioned by

accident, by a sense of our own unworthiness, by a dread of Divine Justice and purity, by a want of Faith, or even from an evil conscience, but the Fearfulness here meant, is a fear of doing what is right, as occasion requires, of maintaining the cause and credit of Christianity, of becoming an advocate for truth and right, of opposing what is wrong, of discouraging and punishing faults, murders, perjuries and the like, and of doing justice to the dictates of our own judgments and consciences, and all this from views of interest and self-love.

The Holy Spirit perceiving that upon these principles many early professors of the Gospel would be driven or thrown aside from their adherence to it, and in all succeeding times men would be tempted to sacrifice the fear of God to the fear of Man, and the like worldly considerations, hath placed this sin at the head of this list, the evil effects of it being more extensive than either of the others therein recited.

In truth, had men the fear of God before their eyes, and were they less slaves to the opinion of others, much lewdness, prophaneness, falsehood and calumny would be

be discountenanced and banished from our conversations, much swearing and cursing in our streets would be restrained or punished, nor would such offensive behaviour be found in our Churches.

Let all those therefore, who are of this fearful disposition, and under the power of it are led to do what is wrong and betray the cause of truth and conscience, remember, that a day will come, when a fearfulness of another kind, of a terrible and avenging nature shall take hold of them; when in the Prophet's description, *They shall howl, for the day of the Lord is at hand, when all hands shall be faint, or fall down, and every man's heart shall melt, and they shall be afraid, when pangs and sorrows shall take hold of them, when they shall be in pain as a woman that travelleth, when they shall be amazed one at another, when their faces shall be as flames, reddening through excess of anguish.*

Upon the whole, hear what the highest wisdom and authority hath determined in the case. Thus saith the Lord by his Prophet, *Who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of man that shall die, and of the son*

son of man that shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy Maker? And thus saith Christ himself, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N III.

LUKE xii. 4, 5.

*Be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and
after that, have no more that they can do.
But I forewarn you whom you shall fear;
Fear Him, who when he hath killed, hath
power to cast into Hell.*

THE primary intention of our Saviour,
in the words before us, appears to
have been to fortify his Disciples, who were
going to preach such truths as were sure to
provoke an apostate Jew, and an idolatrous
Gentile, against all apprehensions of danger,
by counteracting their fears, not only with
the hopes of a future recompence of re-
ward,

ward, but, in kind, by fears of a more powerful nature; by warning them to make a right judgment of the difference between such as had power over the body, and after that had no more that they could do; and Him, whose afflicting their bodies here was but a prelude or foretaste of a total and everlasting destruction both of *Body and Soul in Hell.*

The argument, then, upon which this caution proceeds, is the universal power of God over our frame, both here and hereafter. This point, indeed, is sufficiently clear of itself; but, considering how weakly things that are future and invisible, and which we conceive to be at some distance, operate upon our minds, it may be of more immediate use, by changing the state of the question a little, and placing it in somewhat of a new light, to shew you that the terrors of the Lord, or the punishment of the wicked in the next life, are sufficiently evident from the power of God over our frame in This. In the course of which, if I touch upon some unwelcome and unpalatable truths, let it be remember'd, that it is done to awaken the careless and inconsiderate, and the

the necessity of their case must be my excuse.

What I have undertaken is, to shew, that the terrors of the Lord, or the punishment of the wicked in the next world, are sufficiently evident from the power of God upon our frame in This. And this I shall make appear

FIRST, In respect to the Body; and, SECONDLY, in regard to the mind; both which I shall enforce with a suitable application.

And, FIRST, In respect to the Body. Now, the different species of evils, which wound and distress our outward frame, may be ranged under this general one of pain. And here, of all this numerous family, let any man fix upon that particular kind, of which, from experience, he hath been wont to conceive the most dreadful apprehensions; That under which we labour, or which we have sustained ourselves, being sure to be deemed the most acute of any. Let every man, I say, rest the whole upon what he has felt himself, upon his own accidental or constitutional complaint, whether

ther it be gout or stone, rheumatic or chollic pangs; or, to use the Scripture catalogue, with which the Israelites were threatened, whether it be a fever, an inflammation, an extreme burning, a drought, or the like; (which I the rather mention, inasmuch as those corporeal inflictions were to them figures of their future and eternal misery, just as their temporal enjoyments were types of their eternal felicity.) Let us fix, I say, upon any one of these, and say, when in the height of the disease, in what manner we have been used to measure the moments. Let us suppose a moment to be extended to a minute; let us suppose that minute stretched farther to an hour, nay, to a day; and (if imagination were able to comprehend or sustain the thought) even to a year; but, happy is it for us, that, neither can our frame endure, nor imagination itself conceive, such an extent of misery. Nay, further, if such be the nature of pain and anguish, that minutes appear to be hours, and hours days, what must an Eternity be! A week, a month, under such circumstances, is an Eternity, as far as our conceptions can go. Supposing, therefore, that it should please the Almighty merely to renew these sufferings,

sufferings, and to proportion them to the duration of our eternal state, (for our bodies are to be raised under different circumstances, as we have been good or bad) who will say, He hath not power to do it? And, granting he had made no particular declaration of Himself, in this instance, can we want any further inducement to fear Him? Such are the evils that affect the body. Let us take a view of those, in the second place, which affect the mind.

And FIRST for the passion of Fear in my Text. We have no need of any higher authority than human evidence, that *Fear hath torment*. It is, doubtless, a most uneasy passion, and hath a very unkindly aspect upon the enjoyments of this life. It hath torment in proportion to the object of it, and the interests we have at stake. When it is great and sudden, it is apt to sway the heart of man in a most tyrannical manner; and when least, it is a foe to all the gentler and more pleasing operations of the mind, such as love, joy, peace, hope, confidence, and the like; and is so disposed to multiply and magnify danger, that the very falling out of what we fear, is very often, and in

no little measure, a relief. But, when it is hasty, quick, and alarming, it has been known to seize the whole man, to suspend instantly all his faculties, to arrest the blood, and to disfigure his whole form. When in the awful stillness of the night, some sudden dread hath taken hold of us, and we are awakened thereby to a quick sense of our guilt, and disposed to hasty vows of amendment; when we are roused from some terrifying dream, or start up at the cry of danger, from some sudden alarming accident of the night, what hath been our condition! We read of the churlish Nabal, that, when the wine was gone out of him, and his wife told him what had past, *his heart died within him, and he became like a stone.* And may it not please our Creator to renew this frame of ours, which now, indeed, must sink under it, of so enduring a temper in the next life, as to be able to survive under the continuation of such feelings, without any allay or intermission; and have we not reason to believe, that the wrath of God towards unrepenting Sinners, will, both in degree and duration, exceed any the most exquisite of this kind, on this side the grave? And is it not then our wisdom to resolve all our fears into

into this one, the fear of Him, who, when he hath thus tormented, *hath power to cast into Hell?*

A SECOND particular, which distresseth the heart of man, is vexation or chagrin. Most other maladies, it is evident, are severally peculiar to the different texture and constitutions of mankind; but vexation or chagrin, though it should not operate upon all alike, is, however, frequently incident to All, and is of that troublesome, conflicting nature, that it has not, like many other passions, such as anger, grief, and the like, any present gratification, but is sure to prey upon itself, to shake every nerve, to lash the brain. It is a kind of civil war within a man's own bosom. Persons in this way, the more they strive for relief, involve themselves the deeper. They are like *a Pot making hot with thorns, so doth indignation vex them, even as a thing that is raw.*

Vexation was one of the curses denounced against the Israelites; and indeed we have reason to presume, that, in respect to the wicked, this inward conflict will not end with this life, but will find new and more abundant matter to exercise itself upon, in
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the next. How sorely will such afflict themselves, when they reflect how vast a scope for happiness there was in themselves, for the highest degrees of knowledge and enjoyment, and how ample a provision was made for them by a God of Mercy, and in what manner they have neglected or despised them both ! What must the Deist feel, when he comes to see the riches of that glorious covenant, which is plainly set forth in the Scriptures, (though he would not search for it there) pouring in upon him, not for his delight and amendment, but for his punishment and everlasting mortification !

If, then, our Creator hath been pleased so to constitute our frame, as a check to pride and self-sufficiency, that a man becomes so much at variance with himself, is it not to be presumed, both as to the cause and capacity of suffering, that matters will go worse with him in this particular, hereafter ; that the conflict will be double ; and can we want any more powerful or immediate inducement to fear *Him*, who, when he hath so afflicted, *hath power to cast into Hell*, where, we are told, *there is weeping and gnashing of Teeth* ?

THIRD

A THIRD particular I shall mention, is shame, i. e. a recoiling of the mind inwards upon itself, on the review of something done or omitted, unbecoming our natures and obligations. And though, to an ingenuous mind, a consciousness of the dignity of it's nature, much more of the Goodness of God, must be a sufficient preservative against ought that may bring it upon us; yet so degenerate are we, for the most part, that we are more powerfully wrought upon by the eye and opinion of the world, than by any more generous consideration; than by the fear of offending a most merciful and gracious God. Hence that more than pestilential blast upon a man's whole Being, upon his spirit, fortune, name, and figure, when there falls a sudden blot upon his character; when the mask is either dropt, or torn off; and the eye of the world, by some chance or turn of providence, is let in all at once into some foul vice or fraud, which hath hitherto lurk'd under a fair and respectable appearance. Survey a man, I say, pressed by some hasty conviction, under a confounding insupportable shame, he appears like a tree, blasted and dried up by the roots, he becomes unable to endure the day-light, and
 hastily

hastily embraceth death for shelter. If he survive, indeed, time, shall, perhaps abate something of the keenness of his anguish. But, suppose it perpetual, suppose him standing before the judgment seat of Christ, in the presence of his gracious Redeemer; of Angels; of *the spirits of just men made perfect*, with contempt pouring in upon him from every side; his conscience, i. e. himself, his accuser, unfolding her long records of guilt before him; how quick, how exquisite, must his feelings be, to which time can bring no relief! for, as the cause will then be irretrievable, the effect will be so too.

Shame was Sin's eldest born, of so penetrating, distracting, overwhelming a nature, that our first parents must have sunk under it, or in the words of Jeremiah, *they must have laid down, and their confusion have covered them*, had not God seasonably interposed his saving Grace. Shame is frequently mentioned in the Scriptures as the reward of neglecting or abusing this Grace; but had they been altogether silent upon this head, it is natural to suppose, that the mind will operate after the same manner, though in a seven-fold degree, in another life; and the way,

way, therefore, to avoid this, is, to fear him, who, when he hath so tormented, *hath power to cast into Hell. Wherefore I say unto you, Fear Him.*

Let us apply the same argument to another, and a FOURTH Particular, namely, melancholy, or dejection of spirit.

I speak not of That, which is the effect of an unhappy constitution, such persons being in a much better state, and having much less cause to apprehend any thing of this sort in the next life, than they are disposed to believe. But what I mean is the result of a profligate life, of intemperance and sloth, the natural complaint of a loose and luxurious age, and which holds such multitudes under it's dark empire. Let any one of that number stand forth, and say, whether any prison can be more strait and gloomy than so unhappy a situation; a prison like that, wherein the Author of the Book of Wisdom tells us, the Egyptians were shut up *without Iron Bars*, WISDOM xxvii. 16, &c. The sudden fears, frights, and alarms, incident to persons in this way, may be further compared to what these Egyptians are said to have endured, *their hearts failing them, and*
E a sudden

a sudden fear and not looked for coming upon them, with many imaginary horrors, whether it were a terrible sound of stones cast down, or the voice and running of most savage beasts, or a rebounding echo from the hollow mountains. These latter indeed were owing to a miraculous suspension of the light of the Sun, and the operation of those elements, which they worshiped as deities. But doubtless he who hath so tempered our Frame, as to make it capable of such terrifying impressions, cannot want power to punish the wicked in the next life with impressions still more horrid; and this constitutional darkness is to such, what the other was to the idolatrous Egyptians, *an image of that darkness which should afterwards receive them.* From hence let us advance a step farther to another particular, viz.

FIFTHLY, Despair—Hope is the most durable and friendly ingredient in the human mind. Our merciful God hath laid the firm foundation of it, both in nature and Grace. We are so framed, that when the object of one hope fails, another starts up in it's room, and should every earthly prospect fail us, we can *lay bold* (as the Apostle speaks)

speaks) upon the hope that is before us which entereth into that within the veil, or reacheth beyond the Grave. It is Hope that giveth relish and solidity to all the enjoyments of life. But if any one cause this hope through neglect, or through any presumptuous offence or offences to die away; how wretched must be the condition of that man! He retains the Being, but is emptied of all the privileges of humanity. He is as a branch cast forth and withered. Like Cain his punishment is greater than he can bear—like the wicked in the Book of Proverbs, *his heart fretteth against the Lord*; or like those of whom the Prophet speaks, that *fret themselves and curse their King, and their God, and look upward*, till by another short step they arrive at the precipice, viz.

SIXTHLY, Distraction—But here let charity draw the veil---Let it suffice to observe, that if it hath pleased God at times to unhinge or overset the finest and most exalted understanding, to confound this pride of man, to let loose the imagination, that ever restless faculty, to work it's own horrid and mishapen purposes uncontrolled; to permit the passions to prevail, like the sea coming out of it's bounds, and retiring with as

low and hasty an ebb, bearing the wretch on from one extreme to another, through a miserable alternative of mirth and sorrow, wisdom and folly, supineness and contention, presumption and despair, insensibility and amazement; If these things I say are thus, cannot the same Almighty hand pour in upon us as great, nay, perhaps a greater variety of terrors in the next life? and supposing for a little space all that the Sceptic can wish and contend for in regard to the place and nature of future punishments, must it not be in the power of God to make man his own place of torment? need we look any further than to what is passing within our own frame for evidence or admonition, what abundant reason we have to *fear Him*?

To apply what has been said by way of exhortation.

Knowing therefore the terrors of the Lord we persuade men. This St. Paul tells us, was his method of proceeding. He preached himself, and hath commanded us to preach, *the goodness and severity of God*; not to *handle the word deceitfully*; not to shew one side of the question only; but *to speak boldly, to be instant in season and*
out

out of season; to lay before men his terrors as well as his promises: And therefore if I ought that hath been said shall seem to bear somewhat hard upon a gentle and delicate ear, the duties of this place must be my apology. The Hardened and Inconsiderate are the persons for whose use it was principally intended. There are certainly too many among ourselves, who are apt to give ear to self-flattery; to be making abatements of their guilt at discretion; to patch up a false peace with their consciences; and to fortify themselves, in their own opinion, notwithstanding *the wrath of God* (as the Apostle witnesseth) *is revealed from Heaven*. Upon which score I have taken my argument nearer home; and have shewn them, that *what may be known of God*, in respect either to rewards or punishments, *is manifested in them*, in themselves, in their own frame. For, a moment's thought may convince them, that it must be altogether as easy for the Almighty Author of all things to protract our present sufferings to an endless duration, as it is to enlarge this span of our life, to a boundless incomprehensible Eternity.

Then,

Then, as to the careless and inconsiderate ; This class, it is to be feared, will take in a much greater number of us than we are aware. For, so it is, that, though we are mighty anxious, and have a thousand fears about the intruding accidents of this life ; and are sure to proportion those fears to, or rather to extend them beyond the value of what they have at stake ; yet it is altogether as true, that, in respect to the great issue of All, we betray an indifference and inattention that would ill become the lowest interests of this life. Nay, suppose some stroke from Providence, some alarming truth of the Gospel ; should even what has been offered this day, chance to awaken our apprehensions ; yet the cares and follies of the next half hour will be sure to rush in, and deface these momentary impressions.

It is the old argument, that things present and sensible will still take place of things spiritual and at a distance. I have, therefore, brought this argument home to sense, to their very doors ; that such as will not look into their Bibles, or attend to the dictates of their consciences, may judge of what may be, from what is or what hath been. Let them look into their own frame and texture,

texture, and the miseries incident thereto, and they may easily discern the avenger in every sickness; in every pain a caution, and in every pulse a monitor. Let them be true to every such admonition, and to their own understanding, in making the necessary and obvious inferences from what they find passing within themselves or others on every such occasion. The Almighty hath, indeed, furnished us with higher and more express evidence of what will ensue: But had He been altogether silent upon this head, we have abundant marks of his power within ourselves, and need go no further for evidence, how much it is our duty and interest in all things, and above all things, to *fear Him*.

S E R M O N IV.

I COR. X. 12.

*Let him that thinketh he standeth, take
heed lest he fall.*

WITHOUT taking up your time in
descanting at large upon the occasion
of the words, I need only to remark, that they
were designed by the Apostle as a seasonable
caution to his Corinthian converts, who be-
ing possessed in substance of those blessings
and privileges which they of old time be-
held at a distance only, and through types
and figures, might be drawn aside thereby
into an unwarrantable conclusion, that they
were more secure, more out of danger of
falling from their salvation, than those
who went before them. After a detail
therefore

therefore of God's dealings with offenders from time to time, who thought themselves safe and beyond controul, *Let him* (saith the Apostle by way of inference) *let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* And in the former part of the verse he observeth, that *these things were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.* But before I proceed, it may be proper to remark, that the idea which so often occurs in Scripture of standing, imports uprightness, stability, or firmness in opposition to those other Scripture images of wavering, leaning aside, sliding, slipping with the feet, slippery places, falling. *Let him that thinketh, &c.* In my following discourse I shall shew the usefulness and expediency of this caution.

FIRST, in things spiritual, and SECONDLY in things temporal.

And FIRST in things spiritual, the caution in my Text may be of use against two different species of self-deceit: namely, Enthusiasm on the one hand, and a careless unthinking security on the other.

Enthusiasm can in itself have no stability or duration; forasmuch as it hath not it's foundation in that humility which is
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the proper ground work of true Gospel perfection. It has more of passion than judgement in it; more sail than ballast. It is Religion not of the heart, but of constitution and complexion. While the humble christian proceedeth on step by step, and *with fear and trembling* towards the end of his hopes; while *he groweth in grace, and goeth on from strength to strength*, praying to God *to ho'd up his goings, that his footsteps do not slide, and watcheth thereunto with all perseverance*; persons of this cast take a new and more expeditious way (as they conceive) to Salvation. They are shoots of a forward unnatural growth; they seem to get more early and easily within the favour of the Almighty than other men; they have no fears or misgivings like other folk; they affect clouds and mysteries, raptures, and strange familiarities with the Deity; their doctrines are of so vain and heady a nature, that it is no wonder, if ignorant, weak heads are so often turned by them, nay, and their own too, and that after being tossed from one religious folly and extravagance to another, they are at once by some unaccountable seizure, as they affirm, put in absolute possession of what they

they call the peace, i. e. in a safe unfin-
ning state, and beyond all possibility of fal-
ling. However, though we pity their er-
rors, we judge them not. We would only
caution those, who love to go after what
is new and out of the beaten path, to be-
ware of these dangerous places; for while
such an one *thinketh he standeth*, he had
need to *take good heed lest he fall*.

In the mean time there is at least
equal danger in the other extreme, viz.
a careless unthinking security; FIRST, in
general; and SECONDLY, in some particular
instances: and FIRST in general.---Now if
we were to make our estimate from gene-
ral appearances, we should be led to con-
clude, that whatever may be our condition
severally in regard to temporals, yet in point
of spirituals, all is mighty well with us, and
that there could not be such a general face
of ease and indifference about matters of
the last importance, if men were not too
well satisfied with themselves upon this
head, and void of all apprehensions of fal-
ling. For however the world may be di-
vided, how various soever it's sentiments and
feelings may be in regard to the interests and
events of this life, the generality of men seem
alike

alike easy and composed, and to discover all the marks of self-complacency, in regard to their spiritual estate. They are *careful and troubled about many things*; they take much *thought*; they labour, watch, and strive; they are ever comparing themselves with their neighbour, and envying his better fortune; they solicit, importune, and besiege those in power in behalf of themselves, their children, relations or friends; and persevere in so doing in spite of fatigues, defeats, and mortifications to the very last. But how little do we see of this in matters of ten thousand times the consequence. We see no *strivings for the mastery*, no competitions for *the prize of our high calling*; little or no labouring or interceding with the Almighty in behalf of one another, of our children, relations, or friends. We give ourselves and each other ample credit in point of religion and goodness, and provided we look well, *are lusty and strong*, and keep even with the world, we conclude that all is right, and look no further. And when numbers are thus standing together upon the same ground, it is apt to create a foolish persuasion, that they are all and equally safe and right, and that

each

each is to the other in some sort a security from falling. But as safe as such may conceit themselves to be, their condition is in fact little other, or better, than that of blind men walking towards a precipice; or troops unhappily advancing over a mine just ready to spring from beneath their feet. And yet this wretched spirit of self-delusion does (I fear, and without breach of charity, I may say it) include a very large majority of us. And how affecting a sight is it to behold such multitudes walking on in full security towards that awful period, where if happiness be not our portion, extinction both of body and soul would be a blessing! Let my Text therefore be a caution to such for the future.

Thus it fares with the generality.---Let us apply this caution

SECONDLY, to some particular instances. Thus one, who is well disposed indeed, but having naturally good spirits, is not apt to be embarrassed with fears and doubts about his condition, passeth with himself and the world around him for a much happier being, than the more timorous and diffident, who, through a tenderness of mind and constitution, are always distrustful

trustful of their spiritual estate, and interpreting every thing against themselves, and whose every step is attended with *fear and trembling*. But this ariseth from a misapprehension on both sides: for as the former confiding in his own strength, is in danger upon any sudden temptation, of *falling from his own steadfastness*; it becometh with the latter, as St. Paul saith it was with him, *when they are weak, then are they strong*. They are in the same case with the Psalmist, where he says, *when I said, my foot slippeth, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up*.

Another thinks all to be safe and right, if he be sober, honest, and live irreproachably among his neighbours, if he perform the ordinary duties of morality; and takes Religion to stand within that scanty pattern: But whatever the mere Moralist may think, he is all the while upon very insufficient ground, or perhaps utterly destitute of any foundation. Mere Morality is beginning at the wrong end; it is like building from the top downward: Whereas *other foundation* (saith the Apostle) *can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ*. Faith indeed without works is dead in effect, as a tree without fruit; but then

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we know there can be no fruit without the stock. *By works* (saith St. Paul) *Faith is made perfect*, i. e. as a tree by it's fruit, for works *bear not the root, but the root them*. And what merit can there be in a man's doing those things, which self-preservation and the common interests of society (in which his own is included) have made necessary? Besides, what are these boasted works? Are they such as they ought to be? Are they not at best full of flaws and imperfections? Are they not destructive both in kind and measure? Is not our utmost righteousness so far from being *a garment unspotted by the flesh*, and a covering from the wrath of God, that it is little other than *filthy rags*? Do not these men *compare themselves* by their own measure, and is it to be imagined, they will *judge righteous judgment*? Let my Text therefore be a caution against such a wretched species of self-delusion, which is ever the result of ignorance and self-conceit; and as such I shall leave it, and pass on to a

THIRD sort of men, who keep going on in a course of unrighteous dealing, making the rules of justice and equity to bend to their convenience and profit, and,

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and, by the help of a little Trade-Rhetoric, taking advantage of the ignorance of others ; and deem themselves right in so doing, as having custom and general usage on their side ; sheltering themselves in the crowd, and looking more to what others do, than what they ought to do themselves ; in short, acting in such a manner, as if they esteemed an evil practice to be less evil for being frequently or generally committed.

On the other hand there are many who think they have acted notably in taking advantage of an honest tradesman, by beating down his price beyond all reason, especially if it chance that some occasional distress, or want of currency shall oblige him to yield all his profit, and perhaps suffer loss by a necessary compliance with the unreasonable terms of the bidder. In the first case there is injustice ; but in the latter there is injustice and inhumanity too. But profit and savings of this sort seldom carry a blessing with them. Let my Text therefore be a caution, and let him, who is thriving on the ignorance or necessities of others, and *thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

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Again,

Again, how many sects and modes of worship soever there may be amongst us, however different and averse from each other, there is yet one particular, in which they unite to a man, one common persuasion running through them all; for each thinks himself in the right, and all the rest in the wrong; and accordingly walketh on with full assurance that his *footsteps* cannot *slide*, and in the strength thereof, magnifies himself above and against all other.

Thus the Papist abideth sure (as he conceiveth) in his omnipotence of Holy Church; on the false ground of Dispensations, Indulgences, Absolutions and the like, and judgeth all others sure of falling under eternal damnation.

Thus the Quaker conceives, that he walketh in the light, and hath an unerring guide to his feet: but it is a light from within, of his own making, a guide of his own chusing; not that which is *the true light*, and which was appointed by God to be a *lanthorn to his feet, and a light unto his paths*. It is indeed a lamentable sight to behold such numbers of them under so blind and dangerous a delusion, and going on with the utmost self-satisfaction and complacency

placency in their errors. For if those who pervert or withhold the Scriptures, which were *given by inspiration from God*, are chargeable with presumption, where shall they be found, who (whatever they may pretend) set them aside, and trust altogether to an immediate inspiration, a direct revelation of their own!

Again, those who dissent from us, and chiefly upon matters of ceremonial, think themselves to be right, and that we are wrong. But though this body of men may esteem their separation from us to be founded upon justifiable principles, it is well known, that those of ability among them, and who have studied the Scripture in the regular way, and applied the natural and usual means of improving in them, have been coming nearer to us every day. Such therefore will do well to take care that prejudice, policy, or any other unworthy consideration do not over bear their better judgments; and to consider impartially, on which side this unhappy breach of Gospel Unity is to be charged. And thus the Protestant abides secure (at least too many do) in the name; but doth not consider, that true Religion doth not rest in the name, but requireth, that we *walk worthy* of it. And

thus the Churchman values himself too often upon his conformity and close alliance with antient Christianity, and at the same time dishonoureth his profession by an unsuitable life; and suffers the Mahometan and Indian to go into the kingdom of God before him. Those, lastly, who are in the right and good way, trust too much and too often to their own strength; for they know not how far it may come to be tried upon any violent or unforeseen temptation.

When we hear of any unhappy persons, who, by continually resisting the good motions of the Spirit, by repeated acts of intemperance, prophaneness and indignities against God, have at last been given over *to a reprobate mind*, and have closed a wicked life in apostacy, despair, or perhaps suicide: What will be the Christian's first thought upon such an occasion? He will lament the fate of an unhappy brother; he will bless the goodness of God in hitherto preserving him from so great evils; will be *jealous of himself with a godly jealousy*; he will labour to contain himself in the good way he is in, and will *take heed to his goings that his footsteps shall not slide*.

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Our Apostle reflecting upon the judgments of God against his countrymen, and the extraordinary mercies and privileges vouchsafed to himself, *laboured*, we find, *more abundantly than all the Apostles*; and hath set us, who are ministers of the Gospel, an illustrious example *to keep our bodies in subjection, lest by any means, when we have preached to others, we ourselves should become castaways.*

Thus far as to things Spiritual. Let us apply this caution

SECONDLY to things Temporal. And here let the minds of men be of ever so different a cast, there is one particular, in which they are sure to agree, viz. a desire of being prosperous, of getting out of the shade into sunshine. There is nothing indeed the heart of man covets more, and nothing it can bear less. Those upon whom prosperity waited in their cradles, upon whom the world is sure to smile, who have all their commands obeyed, all their desires gratified, and many of them even prevented; who are removed out of sight and hearing of others misfortunes; and have property, power, and perhaps antiquity on their
side;

side; fancy themselves to be *founded upon a rock*. But as Religion stands within a few of them, too many amongst them, having tried the utmost the world can afford, are in danger of falling into satiety and distaste for want of something better and higher to trust to. Besides so insecure is the happiness of a plentiful fortune to its possessors, and so unstable are possessions in the hands of those, who succeed to them, that we have recent evidence every day, that the prudence and parsimony of the sire are no security against the weakness or wickedness of the heir, into whose hands the mountain of wealth falling, often cometh to nought, and hath occasioned but too many instances of naked titles and illustrious poverty.

Others, who getting ground very fast in the World, and rising daily into wealth and consequence, flatter themselves that all is safe and right, will do well to look round and see what has happened to others. Such would abate much of their confidence should they be made to perceive that the kindest thing, a good Providence can do for them, would be to cross them in their pursuits by some unexpected damage or defeat, rather than suffer them to be undone after
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another and a worse sort, by their falling under the power of an inveterate avarice or love of the world.

How often has it been seen that an antient family, and which had stood high in it's country's honours and esteem, and through it's influence had exercised a little sort of sovereignty round about it, hath yet through a succession of misfortunes, through prodigality, a love of law, attainders, or the like, fallen to decay, and been lost in the common mass of the people ! And another of little or no note, of an humble stock, through industry, frugality and the like hath risen upon the ruins thereof !—Now what do we judge ought to be the sentiments of these new-comers upon a survey of the past and present state of things ? That the old possessors were displaced, *that they might be grafted in ?* Certainly not ; if the present proprietors have a wise and understanding heart, it will naturally lead them to avoid that imprudence, those vices and errors, which proved so fatal to those, who went before them, and to keep themselves in a closer and humbler dependance on that Being, who *bringeth low, and lifteth up*. Such indeed ought to be the sense and behaviour of people in those circumstances,

circumstances, but whether it be so in fact, is best known to God and themselves.

In short, when the Almighty is pleased to impart any blessing or mercy to us, especially if it be done at the expence of others, we are not to look upon it as a matter of right, or as indefeasible; as an invitation to security or boasting, but as coming to us in a double capacity, both as a blessing and a caution: And that every such acquisition, though it be often found to minister to pride and independency, is, and ought to be, the most powerful argument against it, against falling into those sins and follies, for which others were *broken off, that we might be grafted in.*

What has been said points to the following uses.---And

FIRST, let me advise you against an egregious deception the generality of us are under, of laying a greater stress upon being good Protestants than good Christians; against that wretched piece of casuistry of separating between these two, and setting our practice so much at variance with our profession; there being so large a majority of mere nominal Christians amongst us, that the Spirit of Christianity is already reduced to
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very close quarters, and tends very strongly to it's decline.

SECONDLY, let me exhort those, who are rising fast in the world not to forsake their Church (as the manner of so many is) nor to live as they do, to all appearance, independent of God and Religion, and to make that a plea for omitting their duty, which becomes every day a stronger argument for a more zealous attachment to it. Let them consider how many they have known to have been the darlings of fortune, and who yet by some rude shock have been hastily cast out of her lap. Others who by an unwearied attention and perseverance have built up themselves (for so they will call it) to an immense fortune, and fixed their credit upon a bottom, which not only in their own, but in the eyes of the world about them was not to be shaken, have been stopped short, and by some sudden gale coming across have been driven quite out of their course.

THIRDLY, let me advise those, whose happier education and turn of mind have kept them hitherto clear of the general infection, to be close upon their guard with
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respect to those whose acquaintance is dangerous in proportion as it appears to be desirable. A good mind suspects no harm; and the common rules of civility, or, what is called good breeding, are apt of themselves to lead unexperienced and innocent persons too near the snare. And since the generality of the rising generation are gone all into one way in compliance with the pattern that has been set them by those who ought to have known better, what is left for us to do, but to caution those, who are not entered into the way with them, not to trust too much to their present innocence; and to assert the honour of their understandings against what they know to be wrong, though in Those, whom they have been taught to reverence? for if They depart from their characters, the blame lies against Them, it is no disobedience in you, for *we must obey God rather than men.*

In truth, it is amazing what numbers are at work to undermine the happiness not only of their families, (for no good can arise from what is ill done or ill gotten, in the end) but of the public too, which can never thrive, but by the established laws of Prudence, Integrity, Industry, Temperance,

S E R M O N IV. 75

rance, and the like, to which the present practices of mankind run directly contrary.

To conclude : Let us not reckon too fast upon our own virtue or parts, the stability of earthly things, or even upon the goodness of God. The divine goodness is indeed not soon tired : but Justice must have it's time and place ; and this goodness, in the eye of true wisdom is oftentimes most apparent in crosses and disappointments. Calamities are daily interposing to teach mankind a lesson they are very unwilling to learn, *not to be high-minded but fear ;* and as a caution to any man, who in either of the particulars above mentioned *thinketh he standeth, to take heed lest he fall.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N V.

ROM. xii. 18.

*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you,
live peaceably with all men.*

ST. Paul, through the course of this Epistle, appears to have ever in his view the promoting a spirit of peace and moderation between two contending parties, namely, the Jewish and Gentile converts; the former being very conceited and tenacious of their higher privileges as the People of God; and envying on that score the calling in of the latter, whom they had been wont to consider as Aliens, Outcasts, and *Strangers to the promises of God*; while the other were as apt on their part to treat those of the Jewish nation with no small degree of insult, as *branches broken off, that themselves*

themselves might be grafted in. Against a spirit so repugnant to the genius of their new profession, and the like evil practices, he prescribes quite opposite measures, and in particular, cautions them in this Chapter, *not to be wise in their own conceits, to recompence no man evil for evil, and if it were possible, as much as lieth in them, to live peaceably with all men.* It shall be the business therefore of the following discourse to enforce the precept of the Apostle by setting before you

FIRST, the nature and extent of this duty, or what it is to *live peaceably with all men*:

SECONDLY, it's expediency and obligation:

THIRDLY, the conditions or limitations here specified, *if it be possible, and as much as lieth in you*: And then with a word or two by way of exhortation I shall conclude.

And FIRST I am to shew you the nature and extent of this duty, or what it is to *live peaceably with all men*. Now to live in peace comprizes something more than a bare cessation of discord and hostilities; more than merely not hating or harming

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one another. When the Scripture speaks of peace between any it means a state of kindness and amity, a readiness to do all good offices to each other. A readiness, I say; for it is by no means necessary, that there must pass actual expressions of friendship between those, who are at peace with one another: it is sufficient, that there be at all times a propensity of will and disposition towards it. For two nations may be at peace, though not a thousandth part of the people of the one, either know, or have any dealings with those of the other. Thus a private man may live in peace with another whom he has never seen, provided he be ready to do him any office of humanity and charity, when occasion shall require. And indeed this is the only way we can fulfil the Apostle's exhortation of *living peaceably with all men*. For it is but a small portion of the bulk of mankind that can fall within the compass of any man's acquaintance or knowledge; much less can his services extend to them all. Farther, peace implies a mutual intercourse of love and good offices. Covenants of peace oblige both sides, and the moment either party fails, or acts contrary to his obligations,

obligations, the contract is dissolved. So that peace, like friendship, cannot terminate in a man's own self, but requires a plurality of persons, and would be the same with friendship itself; but this last implies a more intimate degree of knowledge, and a more perfect measure of habitual affection. If therefore by peace be understood mutual goodwill, or a readiness on both sides to do good offices, then this exhortation of the Apostle obliges us not only to bear good will to others, but so to frame our behaviour, as that others may tender the same to us. It enjoins us to seek kindness from others, as well as to extend it to them, and to carry on a commerce of love and benevolence, with this difference, however, that we are not to stand nicely balancing our disbursements and receipts, much less then to stand off in a reserved manner, shut up as it were within ourselves, and contenting ourselves with the poor negative praise of not hating our neighbour, but to use all fair and prudent methods to break off all uncharitableness on his part, as well as our own. We may not indeed stoop to any unlawful or unhandsome compliance to gain our neighbours good-will or opinion; but if by abat-

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ing somewhat of our pretensions, and by a condescending behaviour we can any way compass it, it becomes our duty so to do: And there is that natural sagacity in a good mind, which will ever distinguish what is fittest and best to be done upon every such occasion. This will hold likewise in the case of injuries, not only done, but sustained; we should lay hold of every opening to a reconciliation.—Again, we ought not to contemn or look down upon those who are in error, though we know ourselves to be in the right, but should prudently and fairly labour to convince them, and win them over to the acknowledgement of the truth. We ought to be zealous no doubt for the cause of virtue, truth, and conscience; but zeal and passion, arguments and curses, conviction and persecution, are certainly very different things; nay, they are manifestly incompatible; and it is idle to talk of Religion while we cast aside humanity, which is its best and chiefest support. We must not be outrageous or sharp with men of different ways of thinking, how great soever their errors may be, or how weak soever their arguments; nay, we should not be stiff or precise, but by a patient, tractable temper, and

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a cool way of arguing lead them gently into the right way, labour to shew them where they are mistaken, and by quieting their passions make them more attentive to reason. This is the way to *live peaceably with all men*. But, it may be said, is this duty so extensive and universal, as to comprehend all mankind? May we not shew our resentments against those who are enemies of Christ and his Religion, and such as deny or adulterate the fundamental articles of Christianity? Are we to maintain peace even with these? Yes, certainly, in a proper degree and measure, as long as there is the least room, or hope for their recovery to the way of truth; for such is the spirit of Christianity. We ought not indeed to encourage them in their errors, or sacrifice the duties of our profession to popularity. For *woe be unto us, if we preach not the Gospel of God, if we speak not boldly, as we ought to speak*. Our care should be to make them sensible, that it is their persons we love, not their errors. Neither are we supposed to maintain any degree of familiarity with men of erroneous opinions or scandalous lives; but neither are we to count them enemies, or by any ill-timed severity fix them such. A peculiar regard may and ought to be
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had to such as are of the same family, and faith, with ourselves : That indeed should be the centre of our charity, but then we are to take in all mankind within it's circumference, and as much as in us lies to promote good order and harmony in the world. Such is the nature and extent of this duty. Let us in the SECOND place, consider it's expediency and obligations. And here, of that multitude of arguments, that crowd in upon us from every side, I shall urge only these :

FIRST, Peace is a duty bound upon us by the ties and law of nature as men. Even they who have contended most eagerly, that the state of nature is a state of war, have yet been forced to confess, that the first law of nature is to seek peace and follow it. In truth, man is made and framed for society, is impatient of solitude, and cannot be easy in a state of enmity.---When the gusts of passion are over, the man will return to himself, his mind will settle into it's right place and posture ; at least so far, as to perceive the unnatural state he is in ; and, in proportion to the delicacy of his make, will feel an uncomfortable void in his bosom, which nothing but the return of mutual peace can remove

remove or supply. Add to this, that without such return, neither power, nor cunning are sufficient securities for his safety, there being no one so strong, no one so subtle but may be in danger from the most contemptible beings. Farther :

That man was made for society, is evident from his very frame and station. The supply of our common and daily necessities requires mutual peace, concurrence, and confidence. As men, we are all brethren, partakers of the same flesh and blood, sprung from the loins of one common parent, and members of one great family ; and our maker has determined our natural instincts to be subservient to the interests of the whole. We ought therefore to *live as brethren, to be kindly affectioned one to another*, to receive part of our happiness, as it were, by reflection or rebound from others, and, if I may so express myself, to love ourselves in other men.

SECONDLY, we are bound to this duty from the consideration of it's amiableness and excellency. A love of peace is the result of a well regulated frame of mind, the product of wisdom, and is ever found with
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virtue and goodness. It consists in the exercise of the best and most agreeable actions, it is a state of ease and comfort, of quiet and assurance: whereas strife and discord is the joy only of fools, the result of an ill-governed spirit, a state of fear and danger, ever accompanied with troublesome passions and the most uneasy sensations, and undermining the welfare and order of the world.

Peace draweth blessed effects after it; makes kingdoms flourish, and private men easy. It is an inlet to wealth, promotes trade, is the guardian of Liberty; advances arts and sciences; begets and establishes order; is an ornament to the world, an advantage and pleasure to man, and brings glory to God. Whereas on the other hand discord defaces the beauty of his works, unsettles whole communities, filleth the breasts of individuals with disaffection or diffidence, discourages improvements, introducing poverty, and leaving the face of nature rude and desolate. Farther:

The peaceable man is ever a good subject, a good neighbour, and a good master of a family.---As a subject, he is a fast friend
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to government ; repays the benefits he receives from it, in kind ; by preserving, as much as in him lies, the public tranquillity ; by submitting to the necessities of state ; by supporting that authority and those measures which are the source of that peace, which he enjoys ; and by making all favourable allowances for mistakes and miscarriages, as well knowing that so complicated a machine at government, cannot fail of being sometimes out of order, and that mistakes and miscarriages are incident to every state of humanity.

As a neighbour, he judges, that other men have a right to their own peace, as much as himself. As he is sure therefore, to shun all occasions of contention himself, so he interposes with prudence to restore peace among friends or neighbours, that have fallen out. He uses candour in judging of others, by looking frequently into his own breast, and observing the frailties of his own temper or complexion. As he meditates no evil against another, he is disquieted with no suspicion of receiving evil from others. His peaceful disposition is the best fence about his own property. If he sustains any injury, his *anger* does not *rise*
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(as the son of Sirach expresses it, Chap. xxiii. 10,) *according to his riches, or is the more enflamed, because stronger to contend*; but he keeps an equal eye to the duty of forgiveness on the one hand and the interests of the community on the other, never setting his own private interest, opinion, or inclinations, at war with the public. Though he be zealous for right, and truth, and conscience, he is gentle unto all men; apt to teach; patient; in meekness instructing those, who oppose themselves; he considers what his great master did or said, or would have done or said upon a like occasion; never supporting his Religion at the expence of his humanity, by cutting away the very ground upon which it stands.

As a parent or master, his family is the very residence of peace and good order, where no jarings are heard; no tale of strife comes forth to amuse and gratify a censorious neighbourhood. He lays the foundation of his children's future peace, by watching their several dispositions, and fashioning them so, as to make them fall in with each other, and to bear one and the self same way. To this end he discourages little unworthy competitions, and re-
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moves the seeds of jealousy and discontent by an equal tenderness to all; by carrying it with an even hand towards the whole; Setting a profitable example to a divided world, *how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity*; receiving a just reward himself in that heart-felt satisfaction, that serenity of mind, which gives a graceful cast to his outward behaviour, and is the envy of those many wretches, who are all either transport or dejection, all pride, envy, or contention, and whose brightest scenes are at best but a splendid misery.

THIRDLY, we are bound to the exercise of this duty as Christians. Peace was the chief end of the Christian institution, is the subject of it's precepts and tendency of it's nature. As to what our Saviour foretels to the contrary, we are to distinguish between such effects as follow from the nature of any thing, and such as follow only by accident, from some circumstances accompanying that thing. Thus hatred and persecutions were the result not of Christianity, but of infidelity; or of Christianity only, as opposing a torrent of vice and infidelity in the world. No, Christianity was an institution of peace. Christ is called our peace. Nothing in truth
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retards the progress of this blessing so much as self love, against which the Gospel specific is self-denial. Where the former prevails, that man prefers himself to all other beings whatever, and indeed mankind are so sensible of it's deformity, that all civilized people endeavour to conceal it, and are ever making a shew of neglecting themselves and preferring others, by an habitual use of certain forms and phrases prescribed by the rules of politeness. But politeness is superficial, and goes no farther than appearances; whereas the rules of Christianity strike at the root of this evil, requiring a real benevolence to mankind, and that our inward sentiments correspond with our outward expressions of good will. But the fact is, the generality engross to themselves all that benevolence which every part of mankind has a right and interest in: We are apt to appropriate to ourselves all that stock of good will, which ought to be diffused through all. But the good Christian is continually striving to subdue this unruly effort of nature, and learning to despise such unworthy sentiments; the Divine Grace corresponds with his honest endeavours, and as he perseveres in this struggle with himself, he gradually

dually gets the better, he becomes better acquainted with himself, grows more convinced of his own weakness and insufficiency, and comes to see the infirmities of his neighbour with the same indulgence as his own. In a word, as self-love sinks, charity rises, and over-rules all these evil workings of pride and ill nature, which make the generality so restless and troublesome to themselves and all about them, and are an impregnable bar to every Christian improvement.

Let us in the THIRD and last place consider the conditions and limitations here specified, viz. *If it be possible*, and, *as much as lieth in you*. For by saying, *if it be possible*, the Apostle intimates that sometimes it may not be so; and by the clause, *as much as lieth in us*, that it is not always and altogether in our power.

FIRST, It may be impossible to keep peace, and all our endeavours to win over others may prove vain. This was the case of the first Christians, with regard to the Jews and Heathen world. They endeavoured after peace with all men, and among themselves they religiously maintained it; insomuch that it was a common observation

vation among the Heathens, “see how these Christians love one another.” When therefore there was no hope, when a long course of wickedness had quenched every spark of humanity in their adversaries, when there was no hold upon them left, when every avenue to their hearts was closed up, they were then allowed to provide for their safety. Though they were to be *harmless as Doves*, they were at the same time cautioned to be *wise as serpents*, when they were persecuted in one city, they were warranted to flee unto another. They were not to cast their pearls before swine, lest they should trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend them.

SECONDLY, It is sometimes impossible to maintain peace, when the cause of God and Religion must suffer by our so doing. We may sacrifice our own rights, and we must sacrifice our passions to the cause of peace; but we must not sacrifice our duty to God’s truth to that or to any thing else. In short, that may at any time be said in a moral sense to be impossible, which is unlawful.

The SECOND limitation of this duty is *as much as lieth in you*, for no man is obliged beyond

beyond his power. If therefore we pursue peace but cannot obtain it, we have nothing to answer for. If we really and heartily do as much as is in our power, there is no more expected. But this we can never say of ourselves, unless we heartily wish and desire to promote it; for this is always in our power. If therefore we rejoice that our enemy will not be reconciled; nay, if we are indifferent, whether he agrees with us or not, from a secret hope of revenge; though we make him the fairest offers, yet if we wish they may not be accepted, we disobey the precept, and do not all that in us lies, towards *living peaceably with all men*. So again we are faulty, if we do not employ the proper means of compassing so good an end. What those means are, prudence and charity will best direct us. However, in general, it is certain, that meekness and modesty, patience and forgiveness, humility and confession are the most likely means to this end. We must bear with the infirmities of the weak, and consider the temptations they were under from pleasure or profit, from reputation or interest. We must put the best construction we can upon every

every doubtful action ; we must wink at the failings of men ; and what we are really forced to resent, we ought to do it in such manner and measure, as may convince the offender, that it is done against our will ; that it is not malice or ill nature, but self-defence which drives us upon it ; that we are sorry to be at variance, and should be gladly reconciled. Thus have I set before you the nature, extent, and limitations of this duty, together with our obligations to the exercise of it. I shall therefore close up all with one short exhortation.

Let us, as the Apostle advises in another place, *follow peace with all men ; i. e. go in pursuit of it with steadiness and perseverance ; let it rule in our hearts, i. e. be the prevailing principle there, and make all our faculties bend to this great point. Let us in the words of St. Peter seek peace and ensue it, i. e. find out the most suitable means, and put forth our whole powers in the prosecution of them. Lastly, let us with all lowliness, meekness and long suffering, forbear one another in love, endeavouring always to keep the unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace. And may the God of Peace rule in our hearts through Jesus Christ.*

S E R M O N VI.

JAMES iii. 18.

*The fruit of Righteousness is sown in peace
of them that make peace.*

SO many and great are the advantages, and so sincere the pleasures, which naturally arise from a peaceable disposition, that, as far as any virtue can be, this is certainly it's own reward. But this peaceable disposition riseth still higher both in it's value and reward, when not content with it's own happiness, it endeavours to impart the same spirit, the same advantages, and the same reward to others: and to prevent or restrain the several mischiefs which are rising continually from the want of it.

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The Apostle in my Text seems to intimate, that the making or promoting of peace by an happy dexterity in disarming and quieting the passions of men, was, and would be the most successful means of smoothing the way for the reception of the Gospel and it's heavenly precepts, and for producing the fruits of righteousness thereby, namely purity, uprightness, equity, justice, and the like, as by this means they would be sown, or introduced, in peace i. e. without opposition; and considers it as likely to produce the same blessed effect at all times. *The fruit of Righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.* The meaning of which words is this: That the practice of much good, or of many righteous actions in others may be happily brought about by making peace, or interposing to put an end to strife and contention.

In discussing this point I propose to lay before you

FIRST, Some of the necessary qualifications for the performance of this duty, of making peace.

SECONDLY, our obligations thereto, together with the fruits and benefits resulting from

from it, and the evils which proceed from a contrary practice.

Now the FIRST qualification I shall mention, as the foundation of all, is a good mind, a constant disposition and desire to do good in this way, or (as we say) the having it at heart. For the original word, which is here rendered *to make peace*, comprehends the whole intention of your mind and a continued inclination to be ready to this good work. And therefore it is not every person, who hath, once or twice perhaps in his life, composed a difference between two or more adversaries, that is entitled to the character or reward of a peacemaker according to the sense of the word, but such alone, as are not only peaceably disposed in themselves, but are ready moreover to prevent or remove animosities in others, and to *seek out* occasions for so doing, as far and as often as prudence shall admit or charity require.

A SECOND qualification for making peace is prudence and impartiality in enquiring dispassionately and tenderly into the nature of the quarrel, in order to learn on which side the provocation began; to convince the aggressor in the gentlest, or, if that be necessary, in pretty direct terms, of the wrong he
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has done, and of the justice and necessity of his making reparation ; of his being the first to make proper concessions, as he had been the first to give the offence : And on the other side to bring the party offended off from his resentments, by studying to find out what passion has been chiefly touched and hurt upon this occasion, and to take out the sting from the offence by setting things in the more favourable light, and, by explaining, distinguishing, and softening matters to alter his idea of the whole matter in debate, admonishing him to reflect what a number of infirmities human nature is subject to, whether from constitution, or education, and what a variety of temptations there are to act wrong. He will not fail to put the angry party in mind, that people often offend thro' ignorance, much oftner from downright heedlessness, without any ill design ; nay, and sometimes too when they intend well, but are mistaken in the choice of the means. He will remind him likewise that this is the case sooner or later, with all mankind, tho' not equally with all, and more particularly that he himself has a number of failings and faults too, which stand in need of the same indulgence from others as those of others do from him : That tho' the other party was, it
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is true, the aggressor, yet that he himself was perhaps too hasty in resenting, and pushing that resentment too far, and that therefore he should be the more ready to abate of his pretensions, and to compound matters upon easier terms. By carrying it, I say, with an even hand between such as have fallen out, the mediation will be more likely to end in peace to the satisfaction of both parties. There are doubtless other qualifications for this undertaking, which I cannot stand to recount, but whatever they may be, these are the principal and most useful.—Proceed we therefore to the

SECOND particular, namely, our obligations to this duty, together with the fruits and benefits arising from it, and the evils which result from a contrary practice. The commentators upon the passage of my text have considered this phrase *to make peace* as design'd to recommend a peaceable habit of mind in general, which (as I hinted before) would readily and almost necessarily exert itself, when occasion requires, and produce the *fruits of righteousness* by so doing: but as peacemaking itself is so productive of the *fruits of righteousness* in so many instances, I cannot

but think, that the very act of interposing to reconcile offended parties in particular was more immediately pointed out in my text.— The practice of this duty then I shall consider as beneficial in these three points of view. FIRST, as removing some obstacles to religious duties. SECONDLY, as a preventive of much sin, and THIRDLY, as opening a door to much good.

And FIRST I shall consider this duty of peace-making as removing some obstacles to religious duties. It is certain that the business of religion must be but ill perform'd, when strife and contention have unsettled the mind; much more when it is put into a violent fermentation: so that by removing strife and contention, you make men more than half religious. For if little piques, and from trifling provocations, from a breach of civility only or even ceremony, unsettle peoples' minds, as we know they will, at times and places of devotion, and carry off their thoughts from God to the object of their resentment, can it be conceived, when they are at open variance and profest hostilities, but that the fervors and agitation of their minds, much more upon the sight of the opposite party, must so affect both sides, as to defile the Temple of God both within and without them,

them, with unchristian sentiments, and render them utterly incapable of praying for each other, nay, even for themselves?

He then, who applies an healing hand to compose animosities, opens a fair way for religion into the hearts of the parties concerned; nay, renders it more lively and operative in them towards each other in proportion to the distance they were removed from one another. A good office of this kind gives a fresh spring to slackened love and friendship. It opens the door to all charities, which is wont to be shut by strife and variance, and in particular to hospitality, which, however, it may be abused, is an useful minister to good will, harmony, and good neighbourhood, when restrained within the bounds of prudence and moderation.

SECONDLY, peacemaking will serve as a preventive of much sin. *Where envying is, there is confusion and every evil work*, saith the Apostle. If this be true, as beyond question it is, then this proposition must be true of course, that peacemaking tends to prevent much evil:

And FIRST, it prevents a man's impoverishing his neighbour, and entailing distress at the same time upon his own family, thro' its
several

several generations, by pushing his right resentments beyond the limits of reason and christian forbearance, by carrying or removing his suit out of mere pique and resentment to other or higher tribunals, and thereby rendering the decision or decisions, which have already been made in his opponent's favour, as little beneficial to him as possible, nay, and hurting his own fortune too thereby, and while he thinks he is venting his rage against his antagonist, becoming himself all the while a much worse enemy to his own children and dependents by wasting their proper support in law and contention. This surely is cruelty to both, and, by consequence, the greater sin; whoever therefore interposeth to make peace prevents this sin, and the more effectually and beneficially the earlier this good office is done.

A SECOND sin, which is hereby prevented, is slander and defamation, which in a state of contention and opposition is pretty liberally and I may say illiberally too bestow'd on each other, their mouth and their ear being ever open to receive and propagate whatever is to the disadvantage of the opposite party. Nor is the restless spirit which possesses both sides, content with brooding over it's own malignity,

malignity, but endeavours by all the arts of misrepresentation and aggravation by revealing those faults or misfortunes, those secrets which charity should hide, to depreciate their adversary, and to strengthen each his own party, by gaining over as many others as possible to the same sentiments, being prompted thereto by a persuasion, that the more they detract from their adversaries credit, they add to their own.

Indeed it is no easy matter to say how far the effects of slander and defamation in this case may extend; as both parties appear to be united in no one particular, except it be in an unhappy contest, which shall push the mischievous effects of their resentment farthest. This serves sometimes to disunite a whole neighbourhood, and to confine charity, which loves to flow out at large towards all, to one side only. And this is a

THIRD evil, which peacemaking prevents or removes. For when a motion is made, or an occasion offers itself for relieving distress, the first question is apt to be, not so much what the nature or measure of the distress is, but how the party to be relieved stands connected. If with the opposite party, why then that heart, which was on the point perhaps

haps of being melted on the sight or representation of the calamity in question is shut up at once, like ice more hardened after a thaw; and becomes guilty of injustice, not only to these innocent persons, who have still a title to a share in his bounty, inasmuch as it was the will of providence they should be born or placed within such connexion, but injurious, 'tis like, to his own poor also, who ought to receive from him a double share, as being deprived of all assistance from the opposite quarter thro' this means.

In general, what variety of good is intercepted thro' the want of such timely pacification! Medicines to the sick, relief to the needy, succour to the distress'd, support to the oppress'd, counsel or advice to those who want it, instruction to the ignorant, and hospitality as, I said before, the promoter of beneficence, good will, and good neighbourhood.

Now what a diversity of evil doth a man prevent, who interposeth early to make peace! How much more then when the passions of men are on fire, and are for hurrying them into combat and duels, or when upon the subsiding of their passion honour affects to take it up, and obliges men to do that, which
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in their hearts and their judgments they dread and disapprove. And here it is impossible not to vent our detestation of those pests of society who, in cases of this nature, are so assiduous to blow the coals, and to spirit on these combatants to their bloody business, and to become factors for death and destruction, and for that evil spirit too who sets them at work.

To the evils already mention'd may be added perjury and many other wretched ministers of wrath and contention, all which might be happily prevented by a timely pacification.

THIRDLY, peacemaking is an inlet to much good. Now these happy effects are the very reverse of those evils we have been reciting. It opens a way for religion into the hearts of those who were incapable of it during their animosities. It revives and reanimates former friendships. It promotes quiet and unity, and preserves the fortunes of men for their proper use, the support of their families and other good and necessary purposes. It promotes good neighbourhood, gives charity it's free course, enlarges the hearts of men, prevents the tears of widows and orphans, and by preserving life, keeps men from

from blood-guiltiness, with many other particulars, which we have not time to recount.

And here we are naturally led to recommend that excellent and cheap method of *breaking off contention and strife before it be meddled with*, by referring the matter in debate to the candour and equity of friends or neighbours; or, if that be necessary, to the judgment of some knowing and well reputed advocate; and indeed law itself never shines with more lustre, than when it recommends, as it doth in some instances, this pacific measure of, what we call, reference, which it is the duty of each party engaged to seek and accept, as far as may be. Now, one good effect among others resulting from such references is this: that a litigious man is hereby discouraged and perhaps prevented from pursuing his evil purposes at another time, when he finds he will not be allowed to take his own way, but hath his malicious designs turn'd back upon his hands. For a quarrelsome man is as much balk'd and defeated by peacemaking, as by a decree of law against him. So that right is the more likely to take its proper course, while *the fruits of righteousness are sown and produced by it.*

But

But now we are upon this subject, there is another particular I must mention very worthy of praise and commendation in this case, namely, the character of a magistrate, who chuseth rather to be a maker of peace than a dispenser of law; who is much better pleased to conciliate than to decide; to persuade than to compel; to explain, distinguish, and adjust all points which have been misunderstood or misconstrued between the contending parties, and to send them back to their own homes in good humour with each other by a well judg'd and unexpensive mediation: or, if that should not take place, by supporting the weak however against an overbearing antagonist, and by these means *sowing the fruits of righteousness* abovementioned thro' his whole district. Such magistrates are blessings to the country wherein they preside.

But if these deserve well, there are others, who deserve as ill: namely, some of that numerous band, in whose hands a process at law begins, who tho' they perceive but little, if any, foundation for contest, or that the right in law lies unquestionably on one side only, or that the cause is upon the whole a bad one, are yet too apt by art and management

ment to foment the quarrel to the great hurt and grievance of one party, and, 'tis more than probable, of both. And thus (to borrow the psalmist's expression) *fall the people unto them, and thereout suck they no small advantage.*"

Thus have I set before you, tho' in a very brief and summary way, FIRST, some of the necessary qualifications for the performance of this duty of peacemaking, and, SECONDLY, our obligations thereto, together with the fruits and benefits resulting from it, and also the evils of a contrary practice.

To what has been said permit me to add a word or two by way of exhortation.

The beginning of strife (saith the wiseman) *is as when one letteth out water.* It is therefore as much the interest of the community to stem the impetuosity of mens' passion, as it is to keep out inundations by banks and other fences. Religion was designed to do this; but as that pretends not to put a force upon mens' wills, the magistrate and the fear of punishment were to come in aid. But since neither of these have in general been found sufficient, let us see what one another can do.

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You have seen how much good may be done by interposing betimes to prevent or break off contention: Good, not to others only, but to ourselves also: For peace-making hath a peculiar blessedness affixed to it by our Saviour, whose mediation between an offended God and sinful man, holds up to us a strong memento to this duty, for if *God so loved us, ought not we to love one another*, and to have the same care one for another.

Let us then seek and embrace every opening for promoting peace and unity, and let us avoid every thing that hath a contrary tendency; namely, the being hasty with our tongue, repeating grievances, circulating mischief, making reports and stories, and putting the worst construction upon what is said, or suffering others to do so without interposing on the charitable side. Let us apply that happy dexterity above-mentioned, to the disarming and quieting the passions of those who are at variance, and use all honest arts for taking off the edge of the provocation, and preparing a way thereby to a reconciliation. Indeed nothing discovers a mean heart and understanding so soon, as a love of mischief; and nothing conveys a truer idea of a generous mind, than the discountenancing

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cing every thing of this sort, and appearing constantly on the side of candour and humanity. One thing is certain, that those who hate contention, will be ever the most ready to prevent it in others : As those who love it are always endeavouring to infuse their own evil disposition into the minds of others.

Upon the whole, if there be so much good done to others by making peace, what shall be their reward who make it ? Surely those who enable others to receive the truth, have equal merit with those who preach the same ; and he who prepares the ground for its reception, by removing out of the way whatever may offend or hinder the same, hath as just a title to praise and reward, as he who sowed the seed itself. And so it is in the instance before us, these likewise shall receive the fruits of their labours, but in more abundant measure, and when *the Lord of the harvest shall come, both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, shall rejoice together.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VII.

I COR. xiii. 5, 6, 7.

Thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth: Beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things.

THE Apostle in this chapter resolves that most excellent gift of charity or love into it's several branches, viz. patience, forbearance, kindness, moderation, disinterestedness, and humility, and so on; and in the words of my text describes one of the most amiable among them, and which is commonly known among us by the name of candor. Candor you see, is a christian virtue, and is more enlarged upon by the apostle than any other branch of charity: For candor is what *thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; it beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things*—the opposite to it is a spirit of evil interpretation,

terpretation, of perverting every thing to a wrong meaning, of thinking the worst upon all occasions; and concluding too fast from what it hears to the disadvantage of it's neighbour; and is at the same time very unwilling to be undeceived.

It shall be the business of my ensuing discourse, to trace this excellent ingredient in a good mind thro' it's several operations as they stand in the text, upon each of which I must be very brief. And

FIRST, candor *thinketh no evil*—meaning hereby, that it not only harbours no evil thoughts of others itself; but disposeth him, in whom dwells, not to think amiss of any one too soon upon an evil report, nor to determine without very sufficient evidence, against the party censured. It implies a charitable tenderness for a neighbour's reputation, a sincere satisfaction upon seeing him preserve it entire and unblemished, a backwardness to encourage any reports to the contrary, or presently casting them out of it's mind as having no title to be admitted there, without the fullest authority. A man of this ingenuous turn will not let the weakness or malevolence of others have any influence upon him, and more especially where the peace
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and well-being of a man depends upon his character, will not content himself with any evidence, short of demonstration. For he, who adopts the idle suggestion of others, proves himself to be of the same evil mind and the same unthinking head with those who set them on foot; and therefore candor, while it doth justice to its neighbour, will do justice to itself too by *thinking no evil*.

SECONDLY, This species of charity, viz. Candor, *rejoiceth not in iniquity*. There is no greater mark of human depravity, than that malevolent satisfaction, which the world is so ready to indulge upon hearing of any disaster or disgrace that is fallen upon another; more especially the latter. Nothing, I say, marks the corruption of our human nature more strongly than this disposition to *rejoice in evil and iniquity*. If there were not so general and so keen an appetite for evil reports, there would be much fewer attempts to impose them upon mankind, nor would they be issued at all were not the authors too well assured of there being, at all times, minds ungenerous enough to receive them, and tongues ever prepared to give them circulation. If

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any misfortune happens to a great or an eminent man, the little world fancy, they are taking a revenge upon his greatness and superiority, by spreading the account : If to one of distinguished parts and capacity, it administers ease to an envious mind ; and so on. A truly candid spirit indeed is hard to be found ; but wherever it is, it is one of the highest ornaments of our nature. It is the effect of a good judgment in a man, who, by keeping his passion and prepossession under command, will not suffer himself to be carried away, as the Apostle says, *by the flight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*, and who lays the surest foundation for the knowledge and discernment of others in the knowledge of himself. Judgment consists in comparing things with one another, and deciding accordingly. He, therefore, who takes upon himself to determine upon the actions of others without looking into his own bosom, and observing what passeth there, can form no true judgment in the case. He sees only one side of the question, and knowing how little he is able to do himself, is naturally led to expect too much from others ; and for want of being better acquainted with
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his own weakness, is more ready to censure and condemn what may happen to be amiss in others. Such take delight in prying into, musing upon, and divulging the frailties and foibles, the slips and infirmities of those they converse with : nay, some are arrived at that pitch of degeneracy as to rejoice upon beholding others do evil, perhaps because it keeps them in countenance ; and are of that number which St. Paul speaks of in his first chapter to the Romans, who *not only do the same, but have pleasure in those, that do them.* Whereas candor, should it be forced to condemn any notorious enormity, keeps a reserve of pity however for the weakness and temptations to which human nature is exposed. It may condemn, but *it rejoiceth not in, iniquity.* The candid and upright Judge sheds a tear without any impeachment of his wisdom or virtue, while he passeth sentence of death upon the criminal before him. One thing is certain, that those who are most virtuous and most knowing are ever the most candid : But this amiable disposition goes farther yet ; for

THIRDLY, *it rejoiceth in the truth* : i. e. not only takes pleasure in beholding others good

and virtuous; but when falshoods and misrepresentations have been strolling about for some time, and gaining credit with the world, to see them by some fortunate accident detected; and the ends of malice defeated thereby; and more especially if it turns out to the credit of the party injured, this will administer to a candid mind the most sensible satisfaction. It rejoiceth upon seeing good men get the better of their enemies, and thriving against opposition; and it rejoiceth still more upon beholding the truths of Religion, after being perplexed and darkened for a time by the fallacies and misrepresentations of idle Cavillers, clearing their way, and rising gloriously above them all.

Candor not only conceives delight on the sight or hearing of a good action, but most heartily wisheth, that all the deeds of men were such; and discovereth an uneasiness on beholding a neighbour do any thing, that may stain or dishonour his reputation; not that a man of candor and charity must do violence to his understanding, or believe or expect what reason tells him is not to be hoped for: No, candor exacts no such absurdity from us: and that I am sure deserves not the name, which

which can connive at open acts of vice and irreligion.

How necessary in short is this happy quality to keep up a good understanding and harmony amongst mankind! Unity and benevolence take place amongst men in proportion as they are disposed to think well or favourably of each other, and to this nothing can contribute more than the general practice of candor. It dissembles as far as in justice it may what is offensive or wrong; and delights to descant upon what is good and praiseworthy, to set it forth in its best light, and to interpret in the most favourable sense what is ambiguous and doubtful. In short it takes a pleasure in every promising appearance: but it's greatest delight is in the truth.

FOURTHLY, candor or that species of charity, which comes under my text, *beareth all things*.

How it came to be translated *beareth all things* we know not; but according to the original, it should be, *covereth all things*, i. e. all things that may beget ill-will and misunderstanding. It inclineth us to cover or to conceal the evil we know of others. Thus Prov. x. 12. we read, *love covereth all sins*; and

and again chap. xvii. 9. *he that covereth a transgression seeketh love.* So also in the 1 Peter iv. 8. it is said that *charity shall cover a multitude of sins*, which however hath been variously interpreted. For

Charity, or the administering to the necessities of the Saints or of the poor in general, may indeed be the means of covering many offences from the wrath of God. These alms *may come up*, as Cornelius's did, *as a memorial before God*; as an incense thro' the merits of Christ to prevent the ill-savour of our sins, and in effect hide them from his sight. Others however are for applying it to the happy influence of the virtue here spoken of, viz. candor, which by patient forbearance will not see or take notice of many offences, when committed, or will put the most favourable construction upon them: It will suppress evil reports of others, and let them die within it's own breast. So that after all, the translation is not so wide of the truth as it may at first be thought, bearing and forbearing being the most likely means of covering offences, and by consequence preventing ill-blood, and preserving peace and a good understanding amongst men.

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This virtue however hath it's limits, beyond which it may be pushed too far: for where a person is a public notorious offender, acting abominations, in the face of the world, against God and man, or betrays a thorough disregard to religion and reputation; in this case it must be owned that an honest indignation may be let loose to express it's abhorrence of such gross enormities, it being too slender a punishment for that, to which hardly any penalties can be equal. There are cases, however, where evils, though they ought not to be suppressed, must not be exaggerated, or made worse than they are.

This excellent branch of charity, viz. Candor,

FIFTHLY, *Believeth all things*, i. e. is disposed to believe every good it hears of others: Whereas envy and ill-will are hurt and disgusted by such reports; and very loth to acknowledge, what they cannot but believe: Or by the usual arts of detraction, will depreciate and diminish what in their hearts they cannot but approve.

To believe the best of others is the very essence of candor, and a necessary ingredient in a good mind. Nothing indeed is more
amiable

amiable or a greater mark of humanity. And yet after all, what is it? Some virtues owe their best grace to the depravity of mankind, and in this we do no more to our neighbour, than what we expect our neighbour should do towards us. A virtue nevertheless it is, in proportion to the many temptations to the contrary: It is truth's best and most lasting friend; for let any piece of scandal come forth cloathed with ever so many plausible circumstances, it does not easily give up it's first impressions in favour of the object of such scandal; it still believes the best, and frequently finds in the end no cause to repent of such candid prepossessions. It knows how much art and cunning there is in the world, how many different ends there are to be served, and how many different ways of compassing those ends, and puts itself upon it's guard against them all. This amiable branch of charity, namely Candor,

LASTLY, *Hopeth all things.* This quality may be thought somewhat a-kin to the foregoing article; and so indeed it is; it bears a family likeness, but is yet distinguishable from the rest. Candor *hopeth all things.* It is owing to the depravity of mens' hearts,
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and a consciousness of their own undeservings, that so speedy and easy a reception for malicious and defamatory reports is procured. The more shining the character, the more grateful the sacrifice. This is what envy and an evil disposition feed upon, and are dreadfully afraid, lest any chance should defeat their intentions: but candor *hopeth all things*; tho' it be hard pressed by a face of probability or even by a weight of evidence, it holds out to the last; it will hope even against hope, and finds a refuge for the offender, as long as it can, in the goodness of it's own heart. It will still hope the best, and not presently despair of amendment; and will not cease it's endeavours, whilst the least chance remaineth, to bring about a reformation. I might have carried these several points much farther, but let these suffice.—From what has been said permit me to subjoin one general observation.

If mankind were possessed of this amiable virtue, the world would be a very different place from what it is. Many to excuse their want of it, will argue, that it must be born with us, and that the merit of it is merely complexional. How far nature may go to-
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wards it, I presume not to say; or, how far a constitutioned austerity may prevent or hinder it: But it is generally to be found in the most improved understandings, in the soundest judgments, and the largest experience. Men of the greatest abilities have been at all times the most candid. Need I go farther or higher than our Apostle St. Paul, who had as much to boast of, both in point of human and divine knowledge, as any, and yet who more candid than he? *Who is weak, saith he, and I am not weak? who is offended and I burn not,* i. e. to set him right? teaching his disciples to *bear the infirmities of the weak*, and doing the same himself in a variety of instances. And is not candor a necessary duty from man to man? Do we not expect that God will treat us with candor and the most favourable construction of what we do, and make large allowances for our evil deeds, as far as mercy can go! And are we not to shew the same candor to others, that we expect from them.

In truth, there is no better friend to society than a candid mind. The want of it keeps modest merit from shewing itself; and even the best intentions are too often kept
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back from being put into practice, from an uncertainty how they may be received.

A man of candour is sure to be beloved and esteemed, because every body is sure of the same favourable treatment from him, and a candid man can have no enemies, unless it be those, whose evil designs he has crossed or interrupted.

A candid man yields a very cold reception to Tale-bearers, and by giving things a very different turn from what they expect, makes them repent of their undertaking, and less forward to engage in such attempts for the future; and doth his part thereby towards promoting that happy effect, which the wise man speaks of in his Book of Prov. xxvi. 20. *where there is no tale-bearer, strife ceaseth.*

On the contrary, a mind that is of an uncandid or malevolent cast is so far from *rejoycing in the truth, that it rejoyceth in iniquity.* For if time or any event should chance to clear up another's character, with which the world hath been too busy, or reverse its decree against an innocent person, and disperse the calumny, this evil spirit is so far from finding pleasure in the discovery, that it is disappointed

appointed and chagrined, upon having its prey snatched from between its teeth.

There is an antient saying taken notice of by an ingenious writer, and to which he has given as ingenious a turn, which is this : When the winds arise, worship the Echo ; which according to its common interpretation, was understood to mean, when popular tumults or commotions arise, retire to solitude where the Echo dwells. Its true sense, however, he will have to be, when popular reports arise, believe the second report. This a candid mind always doth. Of the like tendency are those cautions of the wise Son of Sirach, *Admonish or advise with a friend, it may be he hath not done it. Admonish a friend, it may be he hath not said it. Admonish or advise with thy friend, for many times it is a slander, and believe not every tale.*

There will be few uncharitable stories going about, would every one wait for the second report. Were we disposed to believe the best and known to be so, fewer attempts would be made by others to impose their evil suggestions upon us, and make us ministers to their revenge. If others *from the evil treasure of their hearts bring forth evil* of this sort,

fort, let us shew our distaste of it, and turn it back upon their hands. Let us not confine our notions of fair dealing merely to matters of right and property: There is equal justice due to one another in our opinions and conversations, and an honest man will think himself as much concerned to alarm and support his neighbour, when his good name is attacked, as when his house is attempted to be broken through.

In order to judge candidly of others, let us make whatever is the point in question our own case, and reflect how we should chuse that the world should deal with us on the like occasion.

In truth, there is hardly any virtue attended with more blessed effects, or more deserving to be ranked with the other branches of charity than Candour, and yet hardly any more uncommon. Whence come misunderstandings, heart-burnings, jealousies, and animosities, but from the want of it?

Let us therefore not be too easy of belief against our neighbour, let the report come from what quarter or through what channel it may. Let us remember that how well soever we may think of ourselves, we have all
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need of much Candour from the world about us; that we hope and expect the most favourable construction of our doings at the hand of God, and that *with what measure we mete unto others, it will be measured to us again.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N VIII.

I PETER ii. 9.

Ye are a chosen Generation, a royal Priesthood.

THE Apostle in this place represents Christians in general as partakers of the Priesthood, or as Priests themselves. It may be proper and natural therefore to set before you,

FIRST, in what sense and measure Christians in general may be stiled Priests.

SECONDLY, in what sense they are a royal priesthood.

Now they are characterised Priests upon these three accounts.

FIRST, As being separated from the rest of the world, and by a special Rite dedicated, devoted, and consecrated to the service of God.

SECONDLY,

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SECONDLY, As having free access to God to offer up prayers and praises to him acceptably.

THIRDLY, As obliged to greater degrees of purity and holiness of life.

But I shall wave these particulars to make room for two very useful enquiries, namely,

FIRST, How far every parent or head of a family is a Priest in his own house, or the duty of Family-Prayer.

SECONDLY, How far every single christian is a Priest for himself, or the duties of the closet.

And, FIRST, &c. In the most early times, every family was an abridgment of the whole, and with the First-born resided the Priesthood. But when mankind was enlarged and spread far and wide, when differences of opinion and practice began to prevail, it was found expedient to reduce the government thereof in this particular to some more invariable standard. And though none but the Priests regularly appointed durst intermeddle in the public Ceremonial; yet still, the First-born was Priest in every family. For each Family had its stated times of sacrifice, confession, prayer, and praise, and the like domestic service morning and evening. In the same manner every particular house among

us is a branch of that great family which is named after Christ, and every head of it obliged to promote the honour of God, and the interests of religion within his own little sphere, just as every magistrate of an inferior district is concerned to support those of his prince, and of the civil community under which he derives; with this advantage, however, on the part of the former, that the parent, or head of the family, is supposed to have the passions and inclinations of those of his household already gained over to his side, that affection and habit have done more than half the work by giving whatever he shall be pleased to say, a more direct and easy passage to their minds: Such a one is a sort of natural priest, and can lead the way in religious family duties, where a regular priest is wanting, with as much propriety and acceptance as a priest in the house of God.

Parents, or those who stand in their place and character, are appointed by God, as his representatives to receive in a certain manner and measure his tribute of honour and veneration, and to preside as priests within certain limits in their respective families, not only for the preservation of peace and good order in their households, and for the security of their old age, but, inasmuch as the Deity is

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invisible,

invisible, that they may be as the eye of God upon those under their care, to mark their goings out and their comings in, to call them to their daily and nightly returns of devotion, nor suffer them to rise from their beds without dedicating the first fruits of the day to God, or to return thither without imploring his blessing, and acknowledging his goodness and protection who maketh them to dwell in safety.

The Laity either do not know, or are not apt to reflect on the share and interest which themselves have in the priesthood, and how far it hath pleased God to make them priests to himself.

Are they not priests, because they are not public ones, or because there are some, who are more formally such than themselves? Have they no part because they have not the whole?

Now there is hardly one of all the particulars which go into the composition and character of a regular priest, but will fall in, though in a lesser scale, with the character of a parent or family-priest above-mentioned. He is separated and distinguished from the rest of the family as God's immediate image and representative, and is to be honoured accordingly.—He has free access to God, and is empowered (nay commanded) to offer up prayers
and

and praises at the head of his family, as acceptably as a priest in the house of God—He is under obligations, though not to preach, yet to second the designs of this place, to take up the thread, where the preacher leaves it, and to fasten it upon the understandings and memories of those under his care, by calling in the workings of natural affection to the aid of truth.

SECONDLY, As to the good or evil of observing or neglecting this duty, let it be remembered that these family exercises put the mind into a right frame and temper for the public offices of religion.

David's heart never exulted so much indeed, as *when he went up into the house of the Lord*: but he had never felt those pleasing emotions, had it not been previously properly prepared and disposed for the celebration of those high solemnities by his more retired performances, when he made *the outgoings of morning and evening*, (which by their natural revolutions are said to rejoice) the proper seasons for gratitude and contemplation; nor have carried his noon-tide devotions in the temple to so exalted a pitch, had they not been supported on either hand by these religious beginnings and endings of the day—*Evening*

and morning, and at noon (saith he) will I pray, and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice.

That the returns of these sabbaths do so little good, that the exercises of the place wherein I stand, are found to fall so very short of their intended effect, that the sparks of virtue and goodness, which are occasionally struck out, by what is delivered, are but momentary, and die upon the very place, and almost at the very instant, in which they first appear, may perhaps be owing to more causes than one; but it is not the least of these causes that such preparations of the heart by these previous acts of devotion are wanting; that our minds are not properly disposed by family worship to receive and improve the benefit of public prayer and preaching.

Private acts of devotion derive much life and spirit from the public celebration of religious worship in these holy places, as the lesser lights in the firmament do theirs from the great ruler of the day, but these reflect what they so receive back again, and thereby add no little life and warmth to public worship. Besides a neglect or omission of these private offices of devotion in any of our families is withdrawing the share and proportion which every man ought to contribute to the common

mon interest and support of God's worship in general.

It is cutting off a vein, or the like means of communication through which the body of religion conveys and receives its mutual supplies! And should such discontinuance of family devotion be permitted to spread and grow general, the body of Religion itself cannot continue in any degree of vigour, but must languish by degrees and fall away, deserted of its best and natural supports.

It is idle in parents to complain, as they are often heard to do, that their children do not pay them their due honour! The fault is in themselves; they take not the lead in religion and so lose it in every thing else; they omit that which is the best support of their honour and influence, and bring themselves upon a level with the lowest, 'till it becomes, in the language of the Prophet, *as with the servant, so with his master, as with the maid, so with her mistress*, to the utter exclusion of religion, unity, decency and happiness. And so it must continue, 'till this course of family-priesthood and family-prayer, be restored to it's antient usage and dignity.

And

And now let every parent or master of a family lay his hand upon his breast, and seriously resolve himself in this question, whether he has done, and does, that justice to his own obligations, to the welfare of his family, and to the common interests of religion, by beginning and ending the day with the offices of devotion, as he ought to do? If he can answer in the affirmative, it is well; let him proceed: If not, let him not leave this place without a firm resolution to be more faithful in all his house for the time to come, and to appear daily and nightly at the head of his family and dependants, in the sacred part of his character, to which God has affixed such high honours and privileges for this very end and purpose: But where these duties are neglected, such honours and privileges can be of little avail: so that such parent or master is not only a sufferer in his own person by having those family-blessings, which are promised by God, and are the natural effects of religion and good order withheld, but makes himself responsible for all the damage both spiritual and temporal, which may accrue to the several branches of his family thro' such his default, and for the loss and hurt, which religion sustains in point
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of unity, by his breaking away from his station, and discontinuing the duties thereof; in the same manner as any civil community must suffer, should any particular house or district refuse to contribute to the necessities of the state, or to join in the general duties of good subjects. And indeed of how large a part of his tribute is the Deity deprived by the too general failure of family-devotion, of how many blessings are such families bereaved, to what dangers and calamities are they exposed thereby! Into how narrow a compass is religion restrained! It is like a tree well nigh bereft of it's branches: The trunk remains; but that which should circulate and return the sap, is either dead or torn off.

Besides, what means can be more conducive to prevent or restrain the encroachments of vice and corruption than family-prayer? what more likely to prevent divisions and animosities? Prayer humanizes the heart and affections, for it ascends like morning exhalations from rivers, that fall back again in refreshing rains and dew. A man cannot pray for others or with them long, and yet wish them ill. Family prayer is placing religion as a guard at both ends of the day. The tempter cannot easily

fly steal a march upon those under your care, while they are busy aday under your eye. Good prayers are at the same time good lessons, nor can a course of disobedience, dishonesty, or any other evil practice well subsist with a regular course of religion.

Having thus shewn how far every man is a priest in his own house, or the duty of family-prayer, together with the good and evil of observing or neglecting this duty; I proceed in the second place, to consider how far every man is a priest for himself, or the duties of the closet. And here I shall set before you,

FIRST, The nature and obligation of these duties, and SECONDLY, the advantages thereof.

And FIRST, as to their nature and obligation. under the law the Priest was to make an atonement first for himself, to the intent, that he, who was to take the lead in the public service, might be sanctified and the better disposed to go thro' those high solemnities with that fervency of zeal and affection, and deep veneration, which the sense of his own obligations must be necessarily supposed to inspire. For as love or charity from the natural disposition of things here, must begin at home, with a man's own self, and flow out
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from thence to those about him and in the end to all mankind : so religion must take its rise in a man's own bosom, and enlarge itself from thence to those of his household, and so on to the outward and more public offices of God's worship. The different parts of religious worship have a mutual dependance and connexion with each other; and it is more especially true, that he, who pays little regard to the early duties of the closet will hardly be regular or true to any other time or act of devotion that is to succeed. It is an error, as we say, in the first concoction, and must have an unkindly aspect upon the whole body of the day.

Now every single christian among us is in this capacity a Priest, or a Priest in his own closet, empowered to offer up prayers and praises to God acceptably for himself. Himself likewise is the Temple of God in his own person, *whose Temple* (saith the Apostle I COR. iii. 17.) *ye are*. Our human frame is as wonderfully put together, as the Tabernacle or Temple were of old, in which the Deity was pleased to reside. Our spirit is likewise a portion of God's spirit, naturally qualified to communicate with it's great original. So that we have all the requisites both
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of soul and body, our soul the spirit of God, our body consecrated thereby, to make an offering of ourselves thro' Christ, and to converse with God, independent of all public services whatsoever. And that which we are every way so well qualified to do, it becomes our indispensable duty to perform.

And such is the case with every single christian. For tho' the sanctuary, the congregation of God's people, is the place where the Deity has declared himself to be in the midst of us, yet christians singly and apart are in no little measure objects of the Divine Goodness and attention in their religious retirements; just as every single atom of created matter is as much under the eye of the Creator, as when they are combined together into rocks, mountains, or this globe of earth itself; or as vegetation, while it is only beginning and as yet unobserved in the seed or kernel, is as much an act of obedience to the laws of creation, and as perfect for the time and in its place, as when it has expanded itself into trunk, boughs, leaves and fruits: these latter, it is true, are more conspicuous and serve to more immediate uses, but they are all of the same original, from the same institution, and to the same general service.

But

But here I must interpose one observation, that tho' the point we are now speaking to, be the business of the closet, or the duties of private and secret prayer, yet every parent or master of a family must not consider himself as so much separated and distinct from the rest of his family even in this respect, as not to be greatly interested in what his children or those under his care do or do not, in this duty of private-prayer; for what they do in their tender years, as it were mechanically, or without a competent sense of what they are doing, is not so properly an act of their own, as of their parents or guardians; and of course the merit of their doing, and the blame of their neglecting it, is their parents or guardians also, 'till they come to years of discretion: nay, even their future, whether good or evil, conduct, in this particular, and indeed any other circumstance of their lives, which may happen to depend on this, will be imputable to such parents or masters of families, inasmuch as it is reasonable to presume that those under their care will lead the rest of their lives according to such beginnings. Thus far of the necessity and obligation of every man's being a Priest for himself, or of the duties

duties of the closet. Let us consider in the SECOND place the advantages of it. And

FIRST, the most commodious season for these retired private performances of prayer and thanksgiving is the prime and best part of the day, for it has this advantage attending it, that the powers of our minds are then most clear, strong and active, and as much at liberty from the restraints and incumbrances of the body, as at any time whatsoever, and which is one sort of proof or specimen, tho' in an humble degree, of what we shall be in the morning of the Resurrection. We now offer up the first fruits of the day to God, the purity and vigour of our faculties and first thoughts, our prayers ascend up with the general fragrancy from all things about us at this early hour; nor can there be a more proper or delightful opportunity for making our returns of praise and thanksgiving to our bountiful Creator, who brought light out of darkness, and whose *mercies*, as the Prophet expresses it, LAM. iii. 33. *are new every morning*. Many of you, my brethren, rise early to the works of your calling, and have the happiest opportunity of beginning the hours with religion, and sending up your prayers to the Almighty for his blessing

sing and protection the succeeding day; beseeching him to guard you in all your ways, to prevent you in all your doings, and to *prosper the work of your hands upon you*. You are much happier in such opportunities, provided you make use of them, than many of your betters and superiors in life, who are under no necessity of labouring for their daily bread, but who have much higher obligations to a kind Providence, and are bound by all the ties of reason and religion to become a pattern of holiness and piety to their inferiors. But can this be the case, with such, where the day is inverted? Can this be compatible with sitting late, and rising at noon? must not their religious as well as their temporal concerns go backward by so preposterous a conduct? Can the evening defilements be sufficiently purged off, or the mind be left free or clear enough for a holy intercourse with God? And is not a clear head as necessary to this, at least, as to any other? We complain that the world is apt to be encroaching and to hinder our devotions, which yet it would not be able to do if we would take care to seize the cool and peaceable hours, that offer, before the scene of business opens; if we would divide the day as we ought to do,
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and would draw a line between the one and the other by shutting ourselves in from the world for a reasonable time. For business will wait, if we think proper it should, and, we all know it, is often made to do so, whenever any scheme of pleasure is to take place. This duty would be much more easily and effectually performed, if we would parcel out our time by rule and into regular times and seasons for prayer and for business, and in case we are driven by any pressing unexpected accident to break in upon the former, to make the best amends in our power by a double diligence and care for the future; besides if we accustomed ourselves to walk by this rule, we could never forget it; nay, the mind would suffer violence and be uneasy upon being diverted or hindered at any time from the accustomed exercise; for a regular course of piety is as easy and unembarrassing and consequently as necessary as a regular course of business. Add to this that having set out well will be apt to add spirit to our public performances, and to stand us in good stead, if we happen to be betrayed at any time into any intermission of duty. In short, the devout christian comes forth from his chamber,

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as light is said to do from the Tabernacle of the Sun (Psalm xix.) prepared and made *strong to run his course*.

SECONDLY, Private or secret prayer, or every man's being a priest in his closet, is the best proof or test of a truly religious disposition. For tho' there may be something more solemn in these public places of divine worship, yet our devout affections at this time may not always proceed immediately or altogether from the heart; but may stand indebted to some exterior helps, as the awfulness of the place, the influence of what is delivered, the example of those about us, (the serious and attentive, I mean) and the like; for in the public exercises of this place we catch an ardor from what we see and hear around us, we light up our flame at that of our neighbours, so that it can not be said to be precisely or altogether our own. But in the retired duties of the closet, in praying to God in secret, our religion has the best opportunity of approving itself genuine and from the heart; whether it be founded upon a right bottom, or no; whether it can support itself without these outward assistances; whether faith in him, who is invisible, be of
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itself sufficient to bear us up above the wearinesses of the flesh, whether the assurance of our sincerity, of the purity of our intentions, of our purposes of reformation, and indifference to the world, together with a sense of God's presence, justice, and mercy be strong enough in us, to support us in so immediate an intercourse with him. For as no man can keep up a spirit of devotion, who knows he is sure to relapse into his favourite sin as before; so he cannot but be more upon his guard, who knows he must so very soon return to the same holy duties, and into the same awful presence again.

THIRDLY and LASTLY, another advantage resulting from the duties of secret prayer, or of every man's being a priest in his own closet, is the privilege of enlarging the compass of our petitions. For as the congregation of the faithful in these holy places must be considered as one body, and be taken together, the provision made for our public addresses to the Throne of Grace must be general, inasmuch as it includes persons of all ages, characters, complexions, and circumstances, whose necessities are continually varying, who have particular sins to be lamented

mented, various mercies to be implored, different wants to be supplied, and manifold blessings to be acknowledged; it cou'd never therefore be extended to the particular care of every single christian or member of a congregation, for that would be an endless undertaking; it would be taking away from that noble simplicity, which is a principal grace of our liturgy, and for which it has been so justly distinguished; it would be making the service of God a vague and uncertain thing, and would be opening a door to many irregularities, nay and indecencies too, as it has been and must ever be the case, where those solemn addresses to God's throne are not regulated and restrained within certain limitations. Our acknowledgments therefore and thanksgivings are reduced to general heads, viz. for our creation, preservation, and for all the blessings of this life, but above all for the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. In like manner the confession of our manifold sins is summed up into that short sentence of leaving undone those things, which we ought to have done, and doing those things which we ought not to have done: But when we are in our closets, and have shut the door about us, we may give or allow a greater free-

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dom to our devotions, and provided we do not go beyond the bounds of religious moderation, may enter into particulars of what we fear, want, desire, or give thanks for, either for ourselves or others ; we may go thro' the whole compass of our hearts, and pour them out before our father, friend, and benefactor ; we may indulge the rapture of thanksgiving, which of itself is as high, perhaps an higher gratification, than what we are thanking him for. We may likewise *pour out our complaint before him and shew him of our trouble*. We can bring our devotions, as it were, nearer home, and adapt our expressions to our own immediate circumstances and wants. The word priest does originally denote intercessor, and christians are called a royal priesthood because of their power with God. The priests under the law were types of the great intercessor ; christians also have the privilege of interceding for others, and the same advantage extends to the closet ; we can exert this privilege in behalf of our friends, wheresoever dispersed, or howsoever distressed, and can accommodate our prayers to their particular situations and conditions, so that we are the happy means of bringing relief not only

to those whom we have been soliciting for, but to ourselves also, to the strivings of natural affection in our own bosoms : And where such an intercourse is kept up in a filial trust and reverence, we may form some conjecture, if we are so unhappy as not to have experienced the same, of the pleasure resulting from it, from what we feel, upon pouring our sorrows into the bosom of some friend in whom we have been used to confide. Upon the whole, a daily sense of God's presence is a stay and support to the mind from within, and these returns of family and private devotion are a sort of fence or enclosure, that secures us from without. These domestic performances are the main supports upon which religion in general stands. A national religion and a national reformation, like other gross sums, must be made up of particular units and individuals, and if each individual would but take care of one, much more of his household, the tempter would be shut out of a considerable part of his present empire. *His goings about*, as they are called, or *his walkings up and down*, among us would be greatly circumscribed, were these *outgoings of morning and evening* but secured against him ; but where these pious exercises are ne-

ver used or are discontinued, the whole is laid bare and open to his assaults, which are sure to get ground as fast as religion loseth it.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N IX.

EZEKIEL XX. 43.

Ye shall remember your ways and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled, and ye shall loath yourselves in your own sight for all the evils that you have committed.

I NEED-enlarge no further upon the words of my text than to observe that they contain in them the true principles and effects of repentance and confession of sins, a duty more especially required at this season, viz. the remembering our ways and all our doings, and in consequence thereof loathing ourselves in our own sight for all the evils, that we have committed. So that I am naturally led to consider in my following discourse

FIRST, the principle or foundation of true confession, *the remembering our ways and our doings.* And,

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, the effect this true principle of confession ought to produce in us to render the same compleat, namely our being sorry for and detesting them. And FIRST,

It is an insult to the Majesty of Heaven and a dishonour to the understanding God hath given us, to imagine that the bare naming our sins, or giving an unmeaning detail of our offences before the presence of Almighty God can answer the end and appointment of religious confession. What! shall we teach God knowledge! *He that formed the eye, shall be not see; he that planted the ear, shall be not hear?* Can any thought be withholden from him *who searcheth us out and knoweth, who understandeth our actions afar off and our thoughts long before,* and who is more present and intimate to us, than we are to ourselves? Is this the way we take to unlade our bosoms of the weight that lies upon them by adding yet this above all, the mocking of God, and so having the whole returned back upon our heads with this dreadful addition? The Almighty doth not want to be told what we are. He knoweth it long before. It is ourselves that know it not, and stand in need of information. So that our
confession

confession cannot be meant to instruct him, but to beget shame, humility and other penitential virtues in ourselves. For true confession is seated in the heart and proceeds from it, and to expect any fruits of penance independent of that, is to expect fruits from a withered and dry stock, or waters, when all communication is cut off with the fountain head. It cannot therefore be a bare recital of our offences that constitutes confession, for in that case we should have little pretence to pity or reproach our popish neighbours, but a penetrating sense of their baseness, offensiveness, and ingratitude.

It is to be feared however that it is this sort of confession (abovementioned) which costs little, and effects nothing, in which the world too generally deals. They confess sins without knowing what they are; they recite them with great ease and indifference, deplore them without sorrow, disavow them without shame, abjure them without resolving against them, and lament their evil consequences daily without the least amendment of their ways, or making any recompence or satisfaction for them. But how can such be ashamed of their sin, who are so soon reconciled to it? Can they be sorry for it, and yet

yet enjoy it? Can they have any displeasure against that, which they go on in pursuit of? Would they repeat what is unpalatable and painful, and act over and over again what they profess to be their torment and vexation, were it really such? And is it not a terrible thought, that so many should approach God with little else than mockery and insult! For notwithstanding the formality of confession, and indeed it too generally amounts to no more, men cannot but be sensible, that there is still a disposition in them to close with the same sin or sins again, and to repeat what they have just before protested against. Consider the solemnity and import of the words, when we acknowledge and deplore our offences: we say, have mercy upon us miserable offenders, spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults—and more forcibly and awfully still, when at the altar, we profess, we do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdemeanors, the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burthen of them is intolerable. If we mean not what we say, if these words fall carelessly from our lips without any communication with our hearts, can we be so blind as to think, that such a confession as this can please God or procure

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our pardon? Hath God any delight in our sins, that he should be pleased with the recital of them, or do we honour to his purity and Majesty by merely recounting our evil deeds? To confess thus is to reproach him to his face, and to set his Majesty at defiance. It is telling him we have disobeyed him, and are resolved to proceed in the same course. It is turning rebel to our maker, and yet coming daily and audaciously into that awful presence to avow such rebellion. It is not to supplicate, but to defy; not to sue for peace, but to declare hostilities. It is not to soften or appease, but to exasperate and render him implacable. In short it is endeavouring to impose upon the Almighty, and putting his omniscience, as it were, to the test.

This highest measure of indignity to God can involve none but those, who join in this act of confession at the altar, either as a cover to some bad design, to save appearances, or merely in conformity to the laws of the land, to secure their honours, their property or preferment, without any other thought or intention, than to answer one or other of these and the like ends and purposes. If an accidental

dental reflection upon such a proceeding doth not make such pretenders to be ashamed and tremble, it is not easy to say, what will.

But, with regard to others I know it will be said, that what is done of this kind in the ordinary course, thro' the influence of common practice, or thro' natural infirmity, cannot come under this imputation. For it is easy to be conceived, that a man may be slack and remiss in his duty and devotion, and yet have no positive design of irreverence, much less insult to the great object of his worship. But approaching God without due reverence, much more with inattention and indifference, must be bad enough of itself. And tho' such cannot be understood to be quite as criminal as the others, they are not aware how far they really do go, and to what degree they incur the divine displeasure thereby, and how far they remove themselves each time from the benefits and blessings, which are the objects of public and private devotion: far enough indeed, if they do nothing at all; but much farther, if they do it in hypocrisy. The former of these may plead, that where there is no positive or intended insult, as they term it, there cannot be the same measure of guilt. True; yet, it is but a poor resource to be
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extracting comfort from this low consideration, that there are others worse than ourselves.

There may be a difference between a neglect and an insult, nay, sometimes the former is worse taken than the latter. But the lowest degree of God's wrath must even in our own apprehensions of it be so intolerable and tremendous, that we should have something else to do, than to be comparing ourselves with others, than to be complimenting ourselves upon not being the worst, and, by consequence, the greatest sufferers.

If my neglect therefore of God during the solemn work of confession be not altogether so grievous, as that of mocking him, I shall have enough upon my hands to bear my own burthen, with very little time or inclination to be enquiring after others.

Those who come to the holy table, without any other thought or intention than to serve a temporary and earthly purpose, which brings them there, must stand in the foremost rank of offenders in this way. While others, who in this joint act of prostration and self condemnation *honour God with their lips, while their hearts, if not utterly averse, are* yet

yet *far from him*, at best are not well with him, are daily contracting more guilt, than they are aware of, or than they are willing to believe. I would not be thought however to exclude them from the benefit of those gracious allowances, which a God of mercy, our creator and our friend, who knoweth our frame and *is touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, is ever ready to make, to weakness of body or distraction of mind from any outward distress, and the like unavoidable impediments in the course of our duty.

But the true principle of confession *is* the remembering our ways and our doings, the reflecting upon them, the having them before our eyes. The act of confession in our public service is too short and too transient, to admit of any large scope for reflexion, and can therefore be considered as a summary only of what has been done more at large at home within our breasts and our closets; and it is presumed, we have possessed ourselves beforehand with a just, a comprehensive and habitual knowledge and conviction of the nature and measure of our guilt. Not but that in every such public act of confession our thought is quick enough to take in the bulk of our sins, and to place in front of them our grosser and more grievous offences. And indeed this
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leading act in our liturgy, and the same it ought to be in our private devotions, was designed to set our sins not so much before God, as before ourselves, to the intent that opposing the number, vileness, ingratitude, and extent of these, with the majesty, purity and goodness of the Almighty, and contrasting the sorry delights we have received from them, with those immortal felicities we have endangered thereby, we may rise up in judgment, as it were, against ourselves, and being pressed by the conviction of our madness and folly, we may *loath ourselves in our own sight for all the evils that we have committed*, which, as I proposed to shew in

The SECOND place, is that effect the principles of a true confession ought to produce in us to render it effectual,

When a man is brought to *loath himself in his own sight*, as every man must when he comes to discern the meanness and dissimulatio[n], as well as the unreasonableness and absurdity of his proceedings, he can never be at peace in that situation. A man that is at variance with his friend, whatever he may pretend, cannot be so perfectly at ease in his own bosom, 'till the misunderstanding be cleared up and removed; much less, when he is at war with himself: he must therefore naturally

ly and almost necessarily endeavour to dislodge that which festers within him, and is become a standing reproach to his conscience and dishonour to his profession, and a burden to his thoughts. Hence the phrases of *labouring* and *being heavy laden*, which import not only the mere load of guilt, the joint weight which shame, grief, remorse impose upon a truly penitent heart, together with an impatience to be quit of it, but the conceiving new and better thoughts and desires, a travailing with good dispositions, earnest longings, and eager endeavours after reformation, tho' as yet perhaps not able to bring forth; which manifestly proves, that 'till we come to *loath ourselves in our own sight*, we are not advanced far enough on our own way to true penitence. But when we are brought to behold our evil ways, in one universal point of view, as they respect God, our neighbour and ourselves, to consider our sins as the prostitution of our natures, as the reversing the end and design of our being, as defacing the noblest work of God, as removing us to a vast distance from him, from the influences of his spirit, the light of his countenance, and the refreshment of hope and comfort, when we are made sensible that our faculties have been abused and per-
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verted to the vilest purposes, our precious time run all to waste, or spent in sin, and compare what we are with what we might have been, every faculty of our minds must rise up in abhorrence; our resentment must return inward against ourselves, the remembrance of these things must beget bitterness of soul, and we shall resolve at last to revenge the indignity to God, and the injury to our neighbour and ourselves, by mortifying our members, by sacrificing our carnal lusts and desires, and by such like voluntary pains and penalties testifying how much we *loath ourselves in our own fight for all the evils which we have committed*. 'Till this be done there will be too good an understanding still subsisting between a man and his sins.

But the most ingenuous motive to confession of sins and *loathing ourselves in our own fight for the evils we have committed*, is a sense of God's goodness. It is the *goodness of God*, we are told, that *leadeth to repentance*. Thus the prophet, when speaking of the goodness of God to his people in increasing their corn, the fruit of the tree, and the fruit of the land, and laying no famine on them, calls upon them in almost the very words of my text (EZEK. xxxvi. 30.) *Then shall ye remember*
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your own evil ways and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations. And indeed, if to the considerations before mentioned this be superadded, we should not only confess our sins, and loath ourselves in our own sight, but we should *lie down in shame and our confusion should cover us.* The sense of God's goodness implies a careful and particular review of his mercies. The word remembering in my text whether we apply it to our own ways, or to the divine goodness, implies something more than barely calling them to mind in general; it implies the carrying our eye thro' the various scenes of our past lives, and marking with all due attention the several merciful dispensations of providence in our favour, and at the same time setting over against these our frequent, our daily provocations: for it is impossible for us properly to discern the true nature and aggravations of our sins without taking into our account the many deliverances, blessings, and mercies, especially that stupendous act of grace and goodness, vouchsafed to us, our redemption by Christ Jesus, the fountain and foundation of all the rest. The contemplation of the former, viz. the good things of
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this life, supposing the latter to be out of the question, must sink deep in an ingenuous heart; but when the latter comes to crown all, a man can no longer sustain the thought of so much goodness being lost upon him, having withstood such strivings of a merciful providence to save him, of his having laboured against redemption and all it's blessed consequences. And can such a man be reconciled to himself and his own evil heart? can he forgive that enemy to it's peace, that traytor to all it's interests? No, he will loath himself in his own sight as the most abject, irrational, unnatural, as the most improvident, unthinking, undiscerning being. He will hate and abhor every thing which a foretime he delighted in; he would gladly escape from himself, from the pollutions, which encompass him about, from the reproaches of his own mind, and finds no other way of doing so than by pouring himself out in confession from day to day, by reversing his former conduct, by an inflexible course of self denial, and labouring to enter by *the strait gate and narrow way that leadeth unto life*, if peradventure God shall give him grace to *find* it.

From what has been said then, it plainly appears, that confession necessarily implies
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these two things, *Remembering our ways, and loathing ourselves in our own sight, for all the evils we have committed.* Remembering (as I hinted before) has respect not only to the number of our offences but their nature, their principles and effects. Confession of sins, in the superficial way it is too generally performed, is doing nothing, it is worse than nothing. There is no surer, no other standard for judging of the several degrees of penitential sorrow and contrition, than what a man feels in his own bosom. If a man knows that he is a sinner, that he has daily left undone what he ought to have done, and has as constantly done what he ought not to do, and hath no quarrel with himself upon that score, but can repeat the same without compunction, without violence done to his own heart, to his own understanding and sentiments, he hath certainly not *remembered his ways and his doings as he ought*; and when such a one prostrates himself before God in confession, doth he not attempt to satisfy for his past offences by a greater; and will not such his repentance require to be repented of?

Our Church hath made Confession an act of daily duty, that every day we may remove
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some part of the weight that is incumbent upon our consciences, and be doing something continually towards reducing that body of sin which we have contracted.

She hath made confession the leading act of religious worship, as being necessary to prepare our way for presenting our petitions to God; so that if we be not more circumspect and attentive in opening our hearts, by unfolding of our sins before God, if we bring not our whole hearts with us, we shall depart greater sinners than we came, and our petitions to the throne of grace for the good things of this life will be turned back upon our hands, and well if it end there, if it do not bring the opposite evils upon us.

Let me therefore exhort you upon your entrance into God's Courts to prepare your minds for this first and most solemn introduction to the throne of grace, and to lay this sure foundation for acceptance of all the subsequent acts of religious duty you are about to perform; to prostrate yourselves with all lowliness, reverence, and the most determined attention, to annihilate yourselves before that Being, in whose sight the stars themselves are not pure, preventing the judgment of God, by

having erected a secret inquisition in your own breasts upon all your ways and your doings, your principles, and your practices, and rendering them more exceeding sinful, and therefore more unpardonable, even in your own eyes, by placing them in opposition to the unwearied goodness of the Almighty, and above all, to that love and kindness of God our Saviour, which (as the Apostle speaks) *bath appeared to all men*, and is displayed at large in the course of this holy week, this awful solemnity, by a distinct and various recital of that scene of sorrows, that stupendous act of humiliation in discharge of our debt to divine justice, which was so minutely paid.

This mournful relation, while we go thro' the several stages of it, should be considered as a powerful challenge to us to remember our ways and our doings, wherein we have been defiled, and which stand in full opposition to our eternal obligations upon that score, and (as I said before) to revenge the wrong upon our passions and appetites, *to crucify our flesh with its affections and lusts*, and to *loath ourselves in our own sight for all the evils we have committed*, and to labour more abundantly (as the Apostle speaks) *to put off the old man with his deeds, and to put on the new.*

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To *remember our ways and our doings* is the Christian's daily duty in confession, but is to be renewed and reinforced with a more than ordinary care and solemnity, at least once a month at the holy Table, and all these are to undergo a yet more strict and general review and presentment before God, on the approaching festival, as the Jews went up to Jerusalem, and the High Priest into the Holy of Holies with the sins of the people every year against the approaching passover.

Let us therefore withdraw ourselves as far as may be, from the cares and engagements of the world, at this holy season, that we may the better *remember our ways and our doings*, which it is impossible to acquit ourselves of, as we should, while we are hurrying forward without intermission after our pleasures or worldly pursuits.

Let us come before God in confession founded on the true principles of penitence. Let us consider beforehand what we are going to do, and what posture of mind befits those, who come into God's courts, and *fall low on their knees before his footstool*.

Confession, without the most determined purposes of reformation, is an indignity to his omniscience,

omniscience, who, when he comes to judge of mens' actions at the last day, will, in the face of men and angels, separate and distinguish between reality and appearance, between the service of our lips and of our lives; between *works meet for repentance*, and those of form and custom; between such as *bring forth fruits worthy of penance*, and those, who (to speak in the words of the Prophet) *conceive chaff and bring forth stubble*. Let us remember, that *his fan is in his hand; that he will gather the wheat into his garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire*.

If our hearts be not sealed up under final impenitence, if there be any remains of ingenuity in us; the recital of that bitter passion, which our divine Representative and Saviour underwent, which the gospels have recorded, and which demand our attendance and attention through the course of this week, must (one would hope and believe) awaken other and better thoughts in us. We may call to you, as David did to the world about him, *Come hither and hearken, and I will declare what the Lord hath done for my soul*.

If we would read and listen, and reflect for what end, and in whose behalf all this was done

done and sustained, the hardness of our hearts, would by degrees give way to such impressions, and we should come in the end to *loath ourselves in our own sight for all the evils we have committed*, so opposite to this wonderful expence (I wish I did not say a waste) of mercy and goodness in the forming, conducting, and finishing of man's redemption.

Upon the whole, let those who are too well satisfied with themselves, their ways, and their doings, remember that a time may come when they shall *loath themselves in their own sight* in a manner and to a degree they have now no conception of, for all the evils they have committed, and their folly in committing them; when it shall be so far from yielding them any benefit, that it may prove the most afflictive part of their punishment, and the endless source of the keenest anguish. For as after the resurrection there will be no weakness or decay of nature, to promote oblivion or insensibility, that anguish bids too fair for being perpetual. Let us therefore redeem what is past, and prevent that sad reversion of unavailing remorse and self-indignation by the most sincere contrition, and unreserved confessions: let us embrace the advice, which long experience and the most
extensive

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extensive wisdom have recommended to us by their own practice. Job warns us not to *cover our transgressions*, nor to *hide our iniquity in our bosoms*; and Solomon reminds us, *that he who covereth his sins shall not prosper, but whose confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.*

That we may think a little more seriously of these matters than perhaps we have hitherto done, God of his, &c.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N X.

JOHN vii. 46.

Never man spake like this man.

TH E S E words were spoken by the officers who were sent by the chief priests and Pharisees, to apprehend our Saviour, but did not prevail upon themselves to do it, being wrought upon so powerfully by what he spoke.

Now, tho' our Saviour's conduct in every instance, as far as our human capacity shall admit of, is to be the standard of the christian character, my design at present is to recommend to you his manner of conversing with others, that you may govern yourselves thereby, as occasion shall require. In order to this, I must observe, that what our blessed Lord spoke is by his great Apostle pronounc'd

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to be profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. In this light then I shall apply it to our own manner of conversing with each other, and as I proceed, shew the excellency and amiableness of our Lord's deportment in every such instance, in confirmation of my text, that *never man spake like this man.*

And FIRST, in point of doctrine: by doctrine we must understand the canvassing or explaining scriptural truths, not the giving the advice, not enforcing the precepts of the gospel; for in that case the word doctrine would be of the very same import with instruction in righteousness, which is evidently designed as a separate and distinct article.

If by doctrine then we mean the discussing of scriptural truths, establishing of controverted points, and recommending the wisdom of the gospel to the judgments of men, a little consideration will shew us what efficacy a right consideration will have to those ends, and how much those ends will be hindered or defeated by want of due care and address in those particulars.

He then who would order his conversation aright in the canvassing of scripture truths, or
establishing

establishing controverted points, and recommending the wisdom of the gospel to the judgments of men, should be temperate, clear, and kindly disposed towards those who are engaged on the opposite side of the argument. Whereas an overbearing impregnable positiveness can at last but overpower, it will never convince the judgment.

When he was in the synagogue, where was a person *whose hand was withered*, and which (as it should seem) he discovered an inclination to restore, there immediately arose a cavil against him among the Pharisees, who with some art and more malice (with a design that they might accuse him) asked him, *whether it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath-day*. In answer to which how coolly and how clearly does he reply in terms that would not at all enrage his adversaries, nor yet fail of making the case quite plain to them? *What man, saith he, shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath-day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath-day.* How gracious and conciliating a method of conviction is this! Here is the truth very clearly and strongly asserted,
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it is lawful therefore, but then this assertion is not insisted upon, till by a most prevailing, yet gentle argument, by putting a most apposite and common case, he calls themselves as it were to witness for him, on which side the truth lay: He left the question to be decided by their own actions, only with this addition, that if they would justify their doing good and shewing compassion to a beast of the field on the Sabbath-day, he would leave it to themselves to consider, *how much better,* or a more worthy object of our commiseration and good offices, *a man is than a sheep.* He knew, doubtless, the malicious intentions of the Pharisees, but as the question was stated to him as a disputable point, he speaks to it with calmness and perspicuity; and would men study and conform themselves to his example in this instance, our debates with each other, and more especially concerning serious matters, would be of real service to ourselves and to the world. Light would be thrown upon necessary truths from both sides: whereas for want of this we suffer ourselves too frequently to become exasperated against each other by the over-zealousness of our arguing, and so very often, instead of coming at the truth, and instructing each

each

each other as friends, we lose the question as it was first started, and each considers his opponent as little other than at enmity with him: While on the contrary, *a soft answer will turn away wrath* even where it really is.

Again, if we have recourse to the 22d Ch. of St. Matthew, we shall find that the Pharisees, who were still endeavouring that they might entangle him in his talk, came to him, and having, with the most flagrant hypocrisy, accosted him, saying, *Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man, for thou regardest not the person of men*; they at length put this next question to him, *Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?* Upon this, he first gives them to understand that he saw the maliciousness of their hearts, but does not let them go unanswered; he discovers no sourness or impatience in the case; but takes a most inoffensive way to convince them, a way so prevailing, that the Evangelist hath thought proper to express their conviction in those short and significant words, *they marvelled and left him and went their way*. He had left them no room for reply. They came indeed as enemies to beset him, but he gave them such an answer, an answer so forbearing,

so plain and unprovoking, that all their malice was taken short for the present, and was utterly at a loss how to support itself. They had now nothing but silence, whereby to hide their confusion. They marvelled and left him and went their way. Whereas, had there appeared an impatient spirit of contradiction or an intemperate zeal in what he had said, we cannot suppose, that such determined enemies would have failed to have improved such opportunity into wrath and contention. But *a soft answer turneth away wrath*. It cools those heats, which our arguings, as they are generally managed, do generally produce. This, if we would observe it, would tend greatly to the shortening our disputes, and clear the truth in most cases from all that rubbish in the midst of which people love as it were to search for it.

I have cited indeed but two instances of our Saviour's conduct in this particular, but would we examine almost all the other questions that were started, his method of answering them we shall find to have been generally the same, to have been always so indeed where the circumstances of the case would admit of it, *and that never man spake*
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like this man. Let us apply the same observation,

SECONDLY, To another particular of conversation, namely Reproof. Reproof doubtless is what men who are for the most part jealous of their understandings, and more so in proportion to their real weakness, are with the greatest difficulty brought to bear with. It is therefore, you will allow, a very hazardous, sure I am, it is of all others the most friendly office we can possibly undertake. For what office I pray you, can carry with it so much real friendship as stepping in between our friend or fellow-creature and the precipice towards which he is posting without thought or reflection?

Not that Reproof is too hazardous a task for any prudent man to enter upon, but that it requires all the judgment a man is master of to discharge it properly. We are to consider the temper, the circumstances and genius of the several persons, upon whom we are going to make this delicate experiment, softening down by all reasonable deference the superciliousness of the proud; palliating, as far as may be, the very faults we would reprove in a person of a more easy, yielding and amenable disposition. Applying ourselves to the
judgment,

judgment, and watching opportunities to awaken the understanding in such persons as have suffered their darling vices to lull it asleep, studying the dispositions of those we reprove, and suiting our reproofs to such dispositions, being always careful to strengthen what we say with the convincing evidence of its not proceeding upon passion, and with the plainest arguments for its being justifiable and well grounded; not forgetting that the several stations and circumstances of those whom we reprove, will always require from us a very different and distinct kind of treatment, remembering however, at the same time, that so much firmness and resolution, as the good of the patient, and the desperateness of his condition shall demand, be always preserved.

Now what did our Saviour? When he calls the Pharisees a *generation of vipers*, he first plainly proves both to them and the standers-by, the inveteracy of their malice, who in order to lower him in the credit and estimation of men, charged him with having *cast out devils by Beelzebub*. In answer to which he first displays the unreasonableness of the charge, which was of such a nature as to overthrow itself, and this he took care to do before he proceeded to treat them in such terms of severity.

verity; but when he had done so it was now necessary that he should set them forth in their true colours, and invite mankind to consider them in their proper characters, whose hypocrisy would have a most dangerous influence on mankind, nay on the success of his preaching too, if they were any longer suffered to hide behind their mask of religion, which could not without some rougher means be torn from them. But as to other sinners of a less hardened and less dangerous nature, with how much meekness doth he reprove them? Nay to some of these dissemblers themselves, when there appeared to be more of vain-glory than of an evil heart, in the case, he uses a world of moderation and tenderness in rebuking them for it. For when one of the Scribes came to him and said unto him, *Master, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest*, in how gentle, how dispassionate a manner does he treat him! He does not directly tell him that he is a hypocrite and dissembler, but lets him plainly see, how little he depended upon his forward protestation, by making himself a kind of apology for him, and setting forth the difficulty of performing what he had so stoutly professed. *The foxes*, saith he, *have holes, and*
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the Birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. As much as if he had said, I perceive thy readiness to serve me as far as bare professions may go: But thy heart is false with me, and the difficulties those must suffer who are true followers of me, will be too many for thee to encounter. This is plainly intimated in the words; but to avoid the appearance of an austere and open censure, our Lord only just mentions these difficulties, and leaves the Scribe to examine his own true intentions by them, and to read the reproof intended him in the construction, or by drawing the consequences himself.

Again, when St. Thomas, after our Saviour's resurrection had been informed of it by the other disciples, he discovered a diffidence, that after all he had seen and heard, was blame-worthy, inasmuch as our Saviour had himself declared before his crucifixion, that he would rise again. *He would not, he said, believe unless he should see in the hands of Jesus the print of the nails, and thrust his hand into his side.* After some days the disciples were again together, and Thomas with them; when our Saviour himself came in, and having blessed them all, calleth Thomas, and

and giveth him that proof which he had through too much diffidence required. Our Lord had now a most fair opportunity as well as great reason to charge him with his unbelief, and he does indeed reprove him, but in so soft, so forbearing a manner, and so far from reproach, that it were happy for the world would men endeavour to copy it in their conduct towards others, when others have offended them, *Thomas, because thou hast seen me thou hast believed,*—a most expressive, yet most gentle rebuke ! which is followed, not so much with a condemnation of his fault, as the blessedness of the contrary practice in others. *Blessed are they,* saith he, *that have not seen and yet have believed.*

I might add many other instances which our Saviour's conversation affords us of the most proper methods of conveying our reproof, when occasion shall require it; but I must hasten to another particular, for which our Saviour's discourses were intended, and in which our conversation ought to be governed by so excellent an example, viz.

THIRDLY, Correction. There is doubtless more nicety and caution necessary in giving Reproof than in inflicting open censure; there is more delicacy of expression, more

art and circumspection to be used in it, but yet neither is censure or correction to be dealt out unadvisedly or without regard had to the temper and circumstances of the offender; for by these is to be directed either the tenderness or enforcement of such censure. The meek and soft disposition may be too much hurt by a tartness of expression, and may indeed by degrees grow hardened under continual and severe rebukes: Whereas a gentle remonstrance, a mixture of commiseration and good-will being interwoven with as much and no more severity than what is absolutely necessary to shew our disapprobation of a wrong measure, will perhaps be the most likely means to work effectually on the flexible and ingenuous mind; while on the other hand there are doubtless such hardened tempers, and such seared consciences, that more corrosive applications are to be made, and a sharpness of expression will find its vindication in the necessity there may be for the use of it. But it must nevertheless be yet farther considered, that even these tarter and more direct methods of verbal chastisement must be always kept within their proper and reasonable bounds, lest they run out into unjustifiable calumny or exasperating reproach.

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But our Saviour's example will afford us the best directions in both these cases, who upon necessary and urgent occasions spared not to use very forcible and sharp rebukes, though his delight we shall perceive was on the other side, to mix meekness with correction, and shame the offender with the softest words that convey resentment, rather than to reproach him in severer terms. As to the Scribes and Pharisees, he first uses every gentle method to convince them of their errors, and even works a miracle for their conviction; but when their malice was no longer to be fed by occasional opportunities of calumniating and depreciating our blessed Lord, when they went out and held a council against him how they might destroy him, and to that end charged him with having practised with infernal powers; our Saviour, who perceived their design, at first only argues on the absurdity of the accusation, but it was now high time to represent his accusers in their proper colours, to give them the names their actions deserved, and reproach them with such practises as might put the people upon recollection, and so bring to their minds the several past instances of their hypocritical behaviour, which could not but invalidate

invalidate their evidence, and point out to the hearers the more strongly, where truth was to be found.

There is a place in scripture indeed in which our Lord makes use of an opprobrious appellation to two even of his own disciples, calling them fools, Luke xxiv, 25. a term generally taken to be an expression of the last indignity. But to remove the harshness of it, it will not be improper to observe to those who are acquainted with our translation only of the New Testament, that the original word signifies no more than (a) inconsiderate, being a very different word from that which our Lord makes use of to the Scribes and Pharisees, saying, *Ye fools and blind*, (b) Matt. xxiii. 17.

Our Saviour has been charged very precipitately by some cavillers with acting directly contrary to the divine law, by that instance of disrespect to his mother, *Woman, what have I to do with thee?* and it has been thought a sufficient defence of his conduct on that occasion, that the phrase was at that time much in use as a term of the highest deference and respect; that however remains to be proved: Whereas if we would find the true motives and justification of our Saviour's proceeding

(a) ἀνοήτοι.

(b) Μωροί.

at this time, we must look farther, and it will appear that at the time of this transaction (his turning the water into wine being, we are told, the beginning of miracles), our Lord was now entered upon his ministry, and by consequence was no longer in subjection to his mother; he was now (as he observes in another place) about *his Father's*, his heavenly Father's *business*.

Mary, though sure of every other regard that was due from him, had no longer any authority over him, and himself openly declares as much, seemingly, if I may presume to say, foreseeing the abuses which would arise in after times of setting his mother in a rank above himself; and in truth had this text been rightly considered, the Virgin Mary had always been honoured indeed, but never adored.

When Peter, in spite of all his protestations, had three times shamefully denied him, how did his good and gracious master resent his infidelity with a silent look only, with that which far exceeded all power of words, with the irresistible language of the eye!

When Judas approached our Saviour, saying, *Hail, Master, and kissed him*, how provoking was the treachery, how foul was the ingratitude!

ingratitude! If resentment could ever be justified by provocation, we might reasonably have expected to hear the traytor branded as he deserved, for his superlative villany; but what doth our Lord? Only this. *Judas, betrayest thou the son of man with a kiss!* He refers him to the conviction of his own heart, every word carried indeed a distinct accusation with it, but couched in terms of such forbearance, that the traytor himself, abandoned as he was, felt the force of them and repented but too late; and happy were it for the contentious world, would they frequently look back to these instances of meekness and forbearance; so might they truly learn to *be angry and sin not*, which leads me to a

FOURTH and LAST particular, namely, Instruction in righteousness; but this would carry me too far, and would be only reciting what you hear every day. I shall therefore confine myself to one article of our Saviour's conduct in this way, who, though upon occasions he *taught men as one having authority*, yet did generally chuse to soften the harsher parts of his doctrine by cloathing them in parables, and to leave the application of them to his hearers. Add to this, that his very
first

first public lesson of instruction in the Mount is of all others the most engaging, where the blessings attending every christian duty are severally set forth to view; and from the general course of his instructions, I would exhort those who have the care of children, whether parents or masters, to make it their principal care, above and before every thing else, to set before their eyes the blessings of religion and the beauties of holiness and goodness, and this too in the most pleasing colours. Laying before young minds the excellence and amiableness of virtue, and the deformities of vice, picturewise, must take the quickest and fastest hold; but I would chiefly recommend the former, the excellency and amiableness of virtue, as the most attractive and engaging: for the faculties in the mind of children are as yet tender, not able to sustain the terrors of punishment, or the rougher parts of discipline any more than their bodies; they must be *fed with milk not with stronger meat*, which if carefully done, they will become good, not from fear, but from choice; they will be christians not in profession only, but principle,

Upon the whole, would the limits of a discourse allow it, I could with peculiar pleasure

pleasure run through the several other instances of our Lord's method of discoursing upon every occasion, and what has been said has been designed not only as a rule of conversation, but agreeably to a point I have long been labouring to persuade you to, a daily and intimate acquaintance with the word of God, and to possess yourselves thereby of such a measure of the spirit of the Gospel, as to sanctify and improve your intercourse with the world, and render your conversation such as becometh that gospel; for the one is the genuine fruit of the other: to admire and imitate that excellency of speech in our great Lord and Master, whose design is to direct and mend the heart, not like others, to mislead or corrupt it. And let Greece or Rome, or the modern arts of writing or elocution, pretend what they may, whether we respect the truth of facts, the clearness of argumentation, the compass and certainty of knowledge, the finest application thereof to the purposes of illustration, the justness of the comparison, the powers of reproof, the blessings of consolation and advice, together with the noblest simplicity through them all, we must all agree in this truth, that as never man lived, so *never man spake like this man*. Now to God, &c.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XI.

PROV. xv. 23. latter part.

A Word spoken in due season how good is it !

BY a Proverb must be understood the drawing together, or summing up into one short proposition, the substance not only of the author's own experience, in the particular of which he is speaking, but that of others also, who have gone before him, or, as we sometimes phrase it, saying a great deal in a little, not only to make it more portable to the memory, but to imprint it upon the mind with the greater force and energy, which is more effectually done in this way than in a more diffusive and formal discourse, agreeably to the wise man's own observation in the 12th of Ecclesiastes, where he remarks, *that the words of the wise are as goads, and*
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as nails fastened or driven home, either at once, or rather by different and distinct strokes or efforts. And as to my text, the book from whence it is taken is but a larger proof of the truth of what is there said, namely, *a word spoken in its season*, (for so it is literally) *how good is it!* I design therefore

FIRST, to set before you the intent and meaning of my text, and

SECONDLY, to bring the application thereof home to ourselves.

And FIRST, I am to set before you the intent and meaning of my text, which will best be done by resolving it into those two propositions, FIRST, what is here to be understood by *a word spoken in its season*; and, SECONDLY, what by the good resulting from it. And

FIRST; The phrase which is here rendered a word, is of various application. Among others it is used to signify counsel, inclination, purpose, and the like, and such is the meaning of it in the passage before us, as is evident, not only from a general consideration of the words themselves, but from the preceding verse, where mention is made of counsel and counsellors. It must therefore imply a speaking our thoughts for the benefit
of

of others, whether of instruction, advice, or caution, whether for their improvement in knowledge or morality, whether directly or indirectly, by open admonition, or the more prevailing arts of insinuation, and will be more successfully and easily done by considering what is intended

SECONDLY, By the word *season*, or a word *spoken in its season*. *To every thing*, saith the wise man, *there is a season*, that is, a time when circumstances so concur, as to render the doing any particular thing much more easy and effectual at such a time than at another.

Time in general, or the flow and succession of minutes, hours, and days, is one thing ; but time as it respects any particular season or opportunity is quite different. *To every thing* (saith our author) *there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven*, and upon an induction of particulars, he mentions one, which hath a more immediate affinity with my text, namely, *a time to keep silence and a time to speak*. Thus in the 25th Chapter of this Book of Proverbs, we read of a word *fitly spoken*, which, though it bear a more immediate respect to the circumstances and manner of its being conveyed or expressed, doth
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by no means exclude the advantages of its being *spoken in due season*. To this purpose is what we read in the prophet Isaiah, as prophetically spoken in the person of Christ. *The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary*, or (as it was fulfilled in fact, and is explained by St. Matthew) *to those that travel and are heavy laden*. Thus St. Paul commands Timothy *to be instant in season and out of season*. Our Saviour admonishes his disciples, as *stewards of the mysteries of God*, and rulers over his household, *to give their flock meat in due season*, that is, at such times when they may be most likely to receive it with pleasure, and to digest it with ease. Upon the whole then, by *a word spoken in its season*, must be understood the ordering our address so, as to set what we have to offer, in its best and most advantageous light, and to secure its reception with those for whom it is designed, by striking in with the present humour at some propitious moment, and gaining upon that passion or affection we would work upon without alarming the rest. Thus far of what we are to understand by *a word spoken in its season*: let us consider

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, The good effects of it. Now the word good doth primarily denote any thing so framed and fitted, so disposed in all its parts, powers, and circumstances, as to answer the end it was designed for. Thus we read that *God saw all his works that he had made, and behold they were very good.* And thus *a word spoken in its season* is here said to be good, when it is so fitly chosen and applied to the purposes of instruction and persuasion, as to recommend itself to the mind of the hearer, which when the mists of prejudice are withdrawn or subsided, will instantly embrace, and faithfully retain the impression. And we know, that in one such happy moment a word of advice or caution shall carry such force and clearness with it, as to act something after the manner of lightning, instantly and irresistibly striking upon the heart, subduing, melting, and pouring it out in confession and sorrow, and making it *fit to be renewed in the spirit of its mind.* How oft has an interposition of this sort availed to dash an exalted wickedness, to turn away wrath, to disarm revenge, to divert an evil purpose, to recover the stray, to heal the broken in heart, and the like? The wise man observes, that *a word fitly spoken*, where more

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is artfully concealed than expressed, *is like apples of gold through pictures, or open work, of silver.*

Nathan's address to the guilty David had never found so direct a passage to his heart, or proved so bright an illustration of his guilt, had he not introduced it under the veil of a seasonable and affecting parable, 2 Sam. xii. Reuben's speech to his brethren with a view to save Joseph from death, wrought so happily for him, that some of them were subdued by it so far as to consent to Judah's proposal for taking him out of the pit (where he would otherwise have perished) and selling him to the Ismaelites, which became an opening to his future glory. Gen. xxxvii.

Nothing could have been addressed more opportunely or more happily to soften the heart of king David in favour of his son Absalom, than what was said to him by the wise woman of Tekoah, her *fetching about a form of speech*, as it is translated, but literally her turning the face or side of the argument towards him in such sort as to give him an opportunity, as in a glass, to discern the severity and contrariety of his own behaviour towards his son. This had its proper effects, *for the king commanded to bring the young man Absalom*

Abſalom again, and Abſalom, we find, returned to Jeruſalem. 2 Sam. xiv.

One word from a little captive maid out of the land of Iſrael was enough, we find, to induce the King of Syria to write to the King of Iſrael in favour of Naaman, who, being a *great man and honourable*, took diſguſt at being treated by the Prophet with ſo little ceremony, and at the ſimplicity of the means preſcribed for the cure of his leproſy, and therefore would not depart from his ſtate ſo far as to ſubmit to the tryal. He was brought off, however, from his teſty mood by a ſingle word from his wiſer ſervants, *My Father, if the Prophet had bid thee do ſome great thing, wouldſt thou not have done it, how much more when he ſaith to thee, waſh and be clean?* 2 Kings v.

A word ſpoken in ſeaſon, was ſufficient to *bow the hearts of all the men of Judah, as the heart of one man*, ſo that they ſent this word unto the king, *return thou and all thy ſervants.* 2 Sam. xix. 14.

And here I muſt remark, that as words are the revelation of the thoughts of the heart, ſo whatever ſhall answer that end more or leſs, as a ſignificant look or geſture, or even an expreſſive ſilence may be conſidered as fal-

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ling within our present purpose and coming under my text.

Thus the Prophet Elisha took a shorter and more immediate course to the conscience of Hazael, by that sure interpreter of the soul the human eye, and one would think the remembrance of it would have effectually interposed to prevent the mischiefs he foretold upon the very first conception. For we read the Prophet *settled his countenance upon him until he was ashamed*. The Prophet's eye was as a glass, in which Hazael beheld himself with all his future guilt upon him so distinctly and perfectly, as to make him start at the sight, and cry out, *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* And yet he did it, and no wonder! for a succession of wicked actions will over-rule the strongest and fairest impressions. 2 Kings viii.

But there is another and a more signal instance of this nature yet behind, such as seems to have set the utmost efforts of the most masterly colouring and expression at defiance: namely, what followed upon Peter's apostacy and denial of Christ, when, as we read, *The Lord turned and looked upon Peter*, Luke xxii. 61. This subdued him at once, and not only produced the most promising symptoms

toms of the most pungent sorrow, but it is reasonable to suppose, was from that hour a perpetual monitor to him of his danger and his duty, and occasioned those short and necessary precepts, (words ever in season) which he had learnt himself, and doth so often inculcate to his brethren, *to gird up the loins of their minds—to be sober—to be vigilant—to arm, to humble themselves—to beware lest they fall from their own stedfastness*, and to pray for God's grace *to establish, to strengthen, and to settle them.*

Having thus set before you the intent and meaning of my text, FIRST, by shewing you what is here to be understood by *a word spoken in its season*, and SECONDLY, the good resulting from it, I shall in the next place bring this doctrine home to ourselves.

Notwithstanding the contrary lesson which is daily taught us, by the constant ministration of all things about us, from the top of the creation to the bottom, to the good of society, man will still go on considering himself as an individual abstracted from or independent of others, and the charter given him as an exclusive one. But he greatly mistakes himself, together with the nature, end, and disposition of that establishment, constitution or

polity in which he is placed, as well as of that more perfect one in heaven, for which this was intended to prepare and fit us, and into which it is ultimately to be resolved. Now there can be no constitution at all, where there is no concurrence or consent of parts; for proof of which St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, refers us to our own bodily frame and system, and brings his arguments against such pretensions to independency home to our very selves, and concludes upon the whole, that *the members should have the same care one of another.*

The man, therefore, whose care terminates within himself and his own improvements, and who looks no further, must expect no other recompence of reward than what will fall within his own little circle. Little I call it, because how great or how exalted soever his single happiness may be, doubtless it might have been still more and greater by communication. But in truth I do not see, how any man can consider his work as done, and himself entitled to his reward, without having contributed to the good of others. For as there can be little or no vice, but must some way or other be prejudicial to the community; so there can be little or no virtue,
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but by connexion, example, directly or indirectly must be beneficial more or less to the world about us. And as there can be nothing more easy, so is there nothing of more immediate or more powerful efficacy, *than a word spoken in its season.* It acts, as I said before, instantaneously and irresistibly, and reaches the heart before its troop of prejudices and resentments can arrive to oppose it. It has gained that at one stroke, which neither perseverance, length of time, nor the most regular and artful approaches have been able to compass; especially when it comes from those, whom we cannot suspect of any intention to mislead us; when it is set in its right light, and enforced with an honest zeal. How much more then upon youthful minds, where few or no prejudices interfere, and the ground is clear and open for its reception!

Now, from the instances above recited, it is manifest, that what is of such general use, hath this further advantage, that it is as generally practicable; that no station of life can place a man out of the reach of being serviceable in this particular. There are none without some degree of influence. The business of the place wherein I stand, lies under many disadvantages, being too generally considered

as a thing of course, and the reproofs and duties here delivered are too scattering, they miss their aim by being of too general application. The chiefest part of the work therefore is behind, and stands with parents and masters, nay, with every man one towards another.

But to make my present application of more determinate use, I shall confine it to three particulars, and shew you the good or benefit of *a word spoken in its season*,

FIRST, In our Families,

SECONDLY, In our Conversations, and

THIRDLY, In our Streets. And

FIRST, In our Families.—And here it is sure to have all the advantages, which authority, natural affection, and a mind unwarp'd by prejudice can give it, either for the promoting of religion and virtue, or the discountenancing of vice. And the influence of it hath been known to extend through every period of life, and to beget a blessed remembrance of its author at the hour of death. And in truth upon these early aids to virtue and checks to vice, our success in life doth principally depend. General instruction will operate only in general; but *a word spoken in*
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its season, nay a look of reproof, the very cast of an eye at a time when your children discover any tendency to what is bad, to pride, cruelty, revenge, vanity, self-conceit, &c. will have a wonderful effect. As on the other hand, a word, a smile of approbation will have a kindly influence towards cherishing and bringing to perfection the first openings and promises of a virtuous disposition.

But there are two sorts of persons, who have put it utterly out of their power to do good on such occasions; viz. Those who have given into a total indulgence or an undistinguishing severity, and though by means widely differing have equally lost their hold. The power of the former has been too far relaxed to be gathered up again; and with the latter a word of admonition, how just soever it may be, or how useful soever in other hands, will lose all its force, as it will surely be imputed to the workings of the same rigid disposition. In short, a word is never in season with them; they have cut away the very ground upon which their authority stands. And well, if the mischief would end here! whereas nothing is more common than to see the fond mother effectually laying the seeds of revenge, cruelty, a love of finery, and the like

like evil impreffions, and generally aided and encouraged in it by the complaisance and concurrence of the company. And indeed, would we trace the many untoward inclinations of mankind to their true source, we must go back to our very cradles. It is unreasonable to suppose such parents can design the mischief they do; but happy would it be for the world and themselves, if, instead of using a multiplicity of words to set them wrong, they would now and then throw in *a word in its season* to keep or set them right, being apt enough of themselves to go astray. For though it be the duty of parents to attend their children's steps, and to lead them in the right way, it will be their wisdom sometimes to leave them to themselves, and to meet them at some unexpected turn, and by a word of reproof or encouragement in due season to replace or keep them upon their guard. Forasmuch as a little praise duly administered quickens young virtue, and is a spur to emulation. As on the other side a check timely interposed on their approaches to evil, then when a young heart is declining from the right way, rejoicing in its liberty, and thinking itself safe and out of the reach of controul, will operate powerfully, for by
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it the blush is raised, virtue is alarmed, pride is distressed, fear, shame, and love, are all up to repel the evil, and to the relief of labouring innocence. And the remembrance of their ill success in these first instances of trial, will be a standing monitor to them against the like attempts for the future.

But though more good may be expected from minds untainted with prejudice, *a word spoken in its season* is not void of influence even upon a riper age. We are not told by the Evangelist, what became of the Scribe to whom our Saviour spoke in so gracious and conciliating a manner, when upon hearing him answer discreetly, he said, *Tbou art not far from the kingdom of God.* But if he did become his disciple, it may fairly be presumed to have been owing in great measure to that kindly word of encouragement thrown in so seasonably and affectingly. Mark xii.

Further, *a word in season* hath been frequently known to heal divisions and animosities, or to prevent their rising.

Joseph's caution to his brethren, at a time when the perplexity they found themselves under from a consciousness of what they had done, would have naturally put them upon shifting the blame from themselves, each upon the
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the other (as people in the like situation are wont to do) and which had already begun to shew itself in that exhortation of Reuben's, *Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child, and ye would not bear*, has something in it very tender and awakening, and was, I doubt not, of singular service upon the occasion, when upon their taking leave of him and returning to their father, he dismisses them with this seasonable admonition, *See that ye fall not out by the way*, Gen. xlv. 24. Let us apply this

SECONDLY, To our Conversations. To mention all the particulars, which fall under this head, would be transgressing the time allowed me. I shall therefore only observe, How often hath *a word spoken in season* turned the course of conversation, when it has been running into prophaneness or impurity! How oft hath one short remark led on a discourse, wherein some great truth has been happily cleared, some giant objection removed, some favourite vice expos'd, and its opposite virtue establish'd, and the hearts of the company surprized into a love of virtue, enlightened, warmed, and made better and happier all their days!

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One good word or motion in apt time and place hath been known to grow up into a public benefit or a wide-extended charity; and a man of little or no note has laid a foundation of happiness to millions of his fellow-creatures by the mere breath of his mouth.

In short, a question asked, a proof demanded, a steadfast countenance, an expressive silence, a truth explained, an instance applied, and a motion made *in due season*, hath availed to silence the scorner, to confound the sceptic, to abash the prophane, to dash a wicked greatness, to convict a triumphant calumny, to recover the stray, and to bring a blessing upon mankind.

Now this is more or less in every man's power, and in the same proportion his duty. For religion and virtue are surely no less the common interest of mankind than wealth or peace; and of course there is an obligation upon every individual to contribute, as far as in him lies, to its support, and to interpose against every violation of it. But alas! tho' the ties of civil interest remain strong, nor are easily broken through, yet, in point of religion and virtue, mankind are as a rope of sand, independent and regardless of each other. Politeness will speak smooth things,
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self-love will prophecy deceits. Men give each other credit for what way of thinking and acting they deem best, and are equally false to themselves and to each other. But what say the saints? *Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour and not suffer sin upon him*, was a precept in the law. *Exhort one another daily*, is the command of an apostle. *Observe the opportunity, faith wise experience, and be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul.* — *Accept no person against thy soul, and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall, and refrain not to speak, when there is occasion to do good.* The same obligation extends

LASTLY, To our Streets, to dash the common swearer, the lewd talker, the profane blasphemer, by *a word in due season*: To turn upon him with an honest indignation, to flash conviction in his face, to take him while the sound of it is yet in his ears, and drive it back to his heart; to resent it as an injury to the community, to ourselves as members of it, and thereby to vindicate the honour of God, retrieve perhaps a perishing soul, and save a sinking people from ruin. This is much more likely to do good, than a fruitless lamentation over the sins of the age, than shaking the head, and walking on, and putting

putting off reproof until the morrow, when the sense of guilt is waxed cold, and the heart is shut up against conviction.

Thus have I fet before you, FIRST, the advantages of *a word spoken in season*, and SECONDLY, brought the application home to ourselves.

What then remains but that I exhort you to close with every like opportunity of doing good, and to throw in your weight into the scale against vice and irreligion, whenever occasion shall require? *For a word spoken in season how good it is!* It has done more than volumes. This our wise Author seems to assert, when summing up our christian duty into one short word or sentence ever in season, he speaketh thus: *Of making many books there is no end, and much study is a weariness of the flesh.—But hear the conclusion of the whole matter, Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.*—Now to God the Father, &c.

...ing off, report, until the narrow, when
the limits of guilt is water-cold, and the heart
is shut up against conviction.

I thus have I feel before you, first, the
advantage of a word, given in a way, and
secondly, brought the application home to
ourselves.

What then remains but that I exhort
you to close with every like opportunity of
being good, and to show in your weight into
the scale against vice and temptation, whenever
occasion shall require? For a word spoken in
light does good, it is, it has done more than
volumes. This our wife Anne seems to ex-
hort, when language up our Christian duty
has one short word or sentence, that is, let
us, the speaker thus: Of making many words
there is no end, and much hurt is a testimony
of the light—let him, the conviction of the
whole matter, let God and keep his command-
ments, for this is the noblest of all—how to
God the Father, &c.

S E R M O N XII.

MARK vi. 26.

And the King was exceeding sorry; yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

IF we look back to the 21st verse, we shall find the occasion of these words to be this :

Herod on his birth day made a supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee, and the daughter of Herod came in and danced and pleased Herod and them that sat with him. The king therefore said unto the damsel, ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee; and he swore unto her, whatsoever thou shalt ask of me, I will give thee unto the half of my kingdom. And she being instructed of her mother came in straight way,

way, with haste unto the king, and asked saying, I will that thou give me by and by in a charger the head of John the Baptist. And the king was exceeding sorry, yet for his oath's sake and for their sakes which sat with him, he would not reject her.

From all which there results this short proposition, which shall be the ground of the following discourse, namely, that a bad mind is at all times the worst casuist in the world. This I shall endeavour to make good,

FIRST, in the instance before us ;

SECONDLY, in some particulars, which occur amongst ourselves, and

LASTLY, I shall subjoin some cautions and reflections naturally arising from the subject in question. And

FIRST, the truth of this proposition is sufficiently clear in the case of Herod, whether it respect, FIRST, his regard to his oath, or SECONDLY, his concern of his company.

And FIRST, his regard for his oath—When any corrupt principle prevails in a man's heart, it will in a short time subdue every other operation of his mind to it's own purposes. It appears, there was a time, when John was in no little favour with Herod ; for
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we read at the twentieth verse, that *Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy and observed him, and when he heard him he did many things, i. e. in obedience and conformity to what he taught, and heard him gladly.* But his passion for Herodias his brother's wife, and the fear of being interrupted in the present pursuit of it by any further rebukes of the holy man, got the better of these considerations so far, that tho' he would not consent to Herodias' proposal for putting him to death, he was yet so ill advised by his own wicked heart as *to send forth and lay hold of John, and to cast him bound into prison.* Whereas had his heart been right, it would have told him, that the same arguments which offered themselves against putting the innocent man to death were equally strong against casting him into prison; and that the depriving him of his liberty, and placing him by this means so much more within the reach of an implacable persecutor, such as Herodias was, and persons in her circumstances are wont to be, was but one, and hardly one remove from giving him absolutely up, as the event did plainly prove.

You see then, he reverences John for his preaching, and was greatly moved by it, but

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by the help of a little bad casuistry he gets over that, and shuts him up in prison.

But how shall we reconcile what the evangelist saith in my text, namely, that upon the daughter of Herodias's demanding the head of the baptist, the king was sorry, *exceeding sorry*!

Now in this there is no great difficulty; for if Herod's concern upon this occasion had been the effect of his apprehensions of the multitude, we may justly suppose it would have been said so: The Evangelist would have represented him under such apprehensions, as terrified and disturbed: But the text affirms *he was exceeding sorry*: and this sorrow of his was by no means unnatural, tho' it was doubtless no small aggravation of his guilt. I take it to have been the ebbing remains of that principle of conscience and natural judgment, which, bad as a man may be, doth not desert him, till the very last; a short-lived compunction of mind from the remembrance of the reverence and regard he once had for him, whose life he was going to compliment away; and that in the midst of all his mighty grief, the Baptist's offence, Herodias's restless spirit and expectations, and his own past disquietudes recurred at once to his

his mind, which agreeably to its usual artifice suggested to him, that he had now a fair opportunity for ridding his hands of this troublesome business with some kind of grace, by borrowing the present occasion to cover his design withal, by making a hasty transport amid the general joy upon the keeping his birthday an apology for his rashness, nay, by giving it a religious turn, and pretending a conscientious regard for his oath. But beside his oath we are told farther,

SECONDLY, That it was *for the sake of those who sat with him.* This was a farther argument, which that ill adviser a wicked heart suggested to him. He would fain persuade himself, or be thought to act under such persuasion, that it would be departing from his kingly dignity to recede from what he had sworn before so respectable a body of witnesses, and be making light of such honourable guests, who had probably so much of the courtier in them, as to be very quick at discerning their royal master's intentions, and pliancy enough to accommodate their way of thinking, at least of speaking, thereto.

Upon the whole, what an inconsistent jumble is here of righteousness and iniquity, of tenderness and cruelty ! Murder must be

committed to avoid a breach of promise, and the head of the Baptist taken off rather than the request of a dancer be rejected. The law of reason must be violated, that the forms of civility may be observed, and rather than disoblige his company, he chuses to offend the Almighty.

In truth, Herod's whole life appears to have been a succession of wicked actions: for we read in St. Luke, *that Herod the tetrarch being reprov'd by John for Herodias his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married in direct violation of the law, and for all the evils that Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.* But he had not so entirely filled up the measure of his iniquity, but his wicked heart had still more for him to do, the adding yet this above all, the mocking God and murdering his prophet, and in the end assuming to himself divine honours, for which however he was taken short after a very signal and extraordinary manner. Thus far of the truth of the proposition, viz. that a bad mind is at all times the worst casuist, as manifested in the case of Herod. Let us try the force of it,

SECONDLY, in some particulars which are to be met with among ourselves, as when a
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man is under the command of any evil passion, he has a ready prompter within, that tells him every thing is right and meritorious that he is going to do under the influence of it. Thus,

FIRST, in the case of a parent, who upon some unexpected instance of undutiful behaviour, shall bind himself by an hasty oath or imprecation to disinherit his child, and as he shall pretend for his oath's sake, but really from an unforgiving temper, or the shame of retracting what he had so positively sworn in the presence of perhaps many witnesses, the man perseveres and dies implacable.

So likewise on the other hand youth and inexperience may have hurried a child, upon some real or fancied mark of discountenance or severity, into an hasty resolution or vow to withdraw him or herself from their father's house, and to continue in such unwarrantable separation from their natural duty, from a regard, as they think, or would have it thought, for their vow, but really from an unwillingness to retract what they have said, and a disinclination to return with so much a worse grace, as they conceive, to their former station in the family. For no one can have a right to swear, what is not in his or her power

er to do; and no child can have power to withdraw themselves from the care and authority of a parent, unless such parent do or enjoin what is contrary to the law of God; for in such case the Apostle hath decided it, *we are to obey God rather than man.*

It is a sure sign of a bad cause, and a corrupt religion, when it's disciples in obedience to an injunction of a pope, &c. and in order to prevent the inconveniencies of a profest defeat, bind themselves by oath to yield to no sort of argument whatsoever. So that an oath in this case is made a prostitute to a wicked end, and becomes a constant bar in the way of truth and knowledge, and yet an oath of this sort is not more so in their case than a bad heart and a wicked life are among ourselves. For a bad heart and a profligate life, acting mutually and powerfully upon each other, are never failing enemies to truth and conviction, and the worst casuists in the world. Such persons hate the light, neither come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov'd. They hear the scriptures witnessing against them, and must therefore find some way of silencing such witnesses and disparaging such evidence. They will therefore make them speak just as much, or as little, as shall serve their purpose; and if in the course
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of the controversy any light shall break in upon them with irresistible force and clearness, yet the fear of a defeat, of unsaying what they have said, and incurring the reproach of men, shall be as impregnable a bar against the admission of truth, as an oath or any other sacred tie whatsoever.

Thus also the demand of an honest industrious tradesman shall be little regarded by a man whose heart is corrupted by the mode, and who is governed by the detestable tenets of modern honour, till his debts of honour are discharged. The poor man may wait at the gate, he may urge his long credit, hard labour, great losses and numerous family; and instead of putting in his claim, become an humble suitor for his own; but what will it avail him? The person, to whom he sues, may be sorry, and be moved to pity him, and were he left to himself, might be disposed to do what is right in the case; but yet for his honour's sake, and for the sake of those respectable persons who sit with him, he must reject him. Such an inconsistency is modern honour, it affects to do more in some instances, than religion can, and at the same time can stoop to that which is most irreligious, and below even common honesty.

Again;

Again; Let a man through some misunderstanding between himself and his companion, nay, perhaps his dearest friend, in their cups overnight have run himself into a hasty resolution or vow to do himself justice, (as it is called) the next day, he shall perhaps be very sorry, when the morning is come, as well for his own sake, as of his friend, to find himself in so unhappy a situation; and yet for his honour's sake, and for the sake of those who sat with them, he must yield up his present and eternal peace of mind by sending his friend or himself, or perhaps both, into another world, as fast as he can.

In like manner some who have had a right education, and have been trained up to good principles, to fear God and reverence his sabbaths, and to consider any proposal to the contrary as a violence offer'd to their understanding and constitution, have however been unable to withstand the solicitations of what is called good company calling to them, and saying, *Cast in thy lot among us, let us all have one purse*, and have been brought at last to walk in the way with them, and to profane the sabbaths: while others, *whose judgment* (to speak in the words of the prophet) *was not to drink of the cup, have yet assuredly*
drunken,

drunken, and though the proposal made to them to drink abundantly has been in direct contradiction both to constitution and habit, yet for civility's sake, and for their sakes who sit with them, they will not reject it.

So also (to instance in a matter not unfrequent among ourselves) a man, who when inquisition is making for blood, or in a matter of property, is called upon, in conjunction with others, to try and true verdict give upon the issue, and upon whose fidelity his king, his country, and the safety of the subject depend, shall perhaps have no great opinion of the present determination of his brethren upon the case, nay, 'tis like he may be of a quite contrary judgment, shall yet suffer himself to be overruled by the importunity or personal influence of the rest, and tho' if left to himself, he would have a due respect to his oath, yet for their sakes, who sit with him, he will not reject it.

Again; Let one man, and that too a friend, admonish another, who is living in a state of fornication, adultery or any other grievous crime, that other shall disclaim all future acquaintance and intercourse with him, and perhaps seal the same with an oath, and from his adherence to this rash oath, no arguments
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or persuasion shall be able to disengage him, that being a convenient measure for preventing any the like interruption from so troublesome a monitor again.

LASTLY, and to mention no more, They who band themselves together against the public peace, and to promote rebellion, and in order to strain the knot of the confederacy as close as possible, bind themselves and one another by oath to adhere to their iniquitous purposes, may persuade themselves, or be thought to act under such persuasion, that they are obliged and authorised by such their oath to pursue such lawless measures, and to do that under pretence of religion, which religion protests in so particular a manner against, to serve one obligation by breaking through an hundred others, and to be afraid of provoking the Almighty, while they are acting all the time in the most direct opposition to his commands.

When one of Cromwell's generals was going to point his cannon against an antient city in England, when the match was ready, and the destruction of the place only not accomplished, it pleased God to touch his heart, by putting him in mind, that in that city there was a famous college or house of education,
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that must be involved in the general fate of the town; that in this society he had been bred himself, and that he had taken the oath usually tendered to its members at a proper age to promote the welfare of the society, and to discover and prevent any evil intended against it to the utmost of their power in the future course of their lives. Upon his remembrance of this oath, he stopped his hand, and by his intercession saved the city. And in this, you will allow he did well: But he had done better to have considered under what sort of oath or obligation he was acting in his present command under an usurper, in support of whom he had violated all his oaths of allegiance to his rightful sovereign, and turned his arms against him and his kingdoms.

In truth, the heart of man, when it is gone aside from that *singleness* or simplicity, of which the Apostle speaks, and is *conformed to this world*, becomes the worst casuist in it, except it be in one particular, viz. its apprehensions of vengeance overtaking its crimes. Thus Cain, upon the murder of his brother, concluded, that *the hand of every man would be against him*. Thus the conscience of Joseph's brethren was very quick at interpreting the distress they were brought into, as the
hand

hand of Providence against them for their crime against their brother. And so it was in the case of Herod; for though he was so bad a reasoner, as to seek to justify an act of the most outrageous inhumanity under cover of an accidental rashness, he was quick enough at concluding upon hearing of the fame of Jesus, that God had raised John from the dead, and that he was coming with power to revenge himself upon him. *It is John*, (said he, seemingly with great emotion) *It is John whom I beheaded, he is risen from the dead.*

Having thus proved from the passage before us, that a bad mind is ever a bad casuist, FIRST, In the case of Herod, and SECONDLY, In many particulars among ourselves, I shall subjoin some reflections and cautions for our use and improvement: And that in respect to two particulars, FIRST, Rash oaths, and, SECONDLY, An unreasonable compliance with our company.

With respect to the FIRST, viz. Rash oaths, I shall only observe, in regard to the subject of my text, that, if after taking an oath to do, or not to do any particular thing, it shall appear, that what we have sworn to, be wicked or unlawful, we ought immediately

to

to repent of our having taken it, but by no means to perform it: For that would be doubling our transgression, and making the sin we were guilty of in swearing rashly, more exceeding sinful, by doing what is wrong deliberately. Thus, for instance, the Jews, who *bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul*, had they succeeded in their design, and performed their oath, had been actually, as well as intentionally, wicked, and instead of being righteous in the observation of their vow, would have sunk the deeper in guilt, by adding the sin of murder to that of rash swearing, as Herod actually did in the case of John. For a subsequent obligation cannot take off the force of one that is prior and superior to it. Thus Herod's oath was a subsequent obligation, which could not abate the necessity of his observing that original obligation to *do no murder*; nor had he any right to make a compliment of the Baptist's life, which he had no legal power or pretension to take from him. Let me caution you,

SECONDLY, Against doing what is wrong in compliance with company. This is a snare in which many have been taken. Some of whom upon their first entrance into public

public life, through a natural strength of mind, or the power of good principles and a right education, have been able to withstand many occasional temptations, and been remarkable for steddiness and a just way of thinking; yet, in order to render themselves of some consequence, and to attain some flattering marks of distinction, have delivered themselves up to others, especially their betters, and have come by degrees to be melted down into the same common mass with the rest of the company, and to be made any thing and every thing for the time to come, these would have them to be.

Some there are who are disposed to be good, and to do what is right, but are slaves to an unhappy complexion, are apt to be shame-faced, and upon that score unable to stand out against the solicitations of others, especially their superiors. They are bad at a denial, which often leads them into more evil and embarrassments than all their other infirmities and vices put together. Hence we see many who are Sabbath-breakers against conscience, drunkards against constitution, fops against nature, gamesters against natural spirit, swearers against use and even utterance, prophane and tremblers at the same time.

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But can it be any proof of a manly spirit, or of being a person of consequence, to be under the management of another, to receive our orders and instructions, nay our very fashion and figure from such as have no manner of right over us? Can it be any credit to a man to be of so waxen a disposition as to yield to every hand that shall undertake to lead him? What is he, to whom another saith, *Go and he goeth; Come, and he cometh; Do this, and he doth it?* Certainly (as the Apostle observeth) *of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage.* Now what is to be done?

Why, if a man be shame-faced, and of so unhappy a complexion, as to be unable to bear up against the power or persuasion of those that sit with him, let him take the hint his complexion gives him; let him retire from the snare, and consort with the true friends of liberty and patrons of modesty, the virtuous and good. For better is it to live in the shade, than to be liable to corrupt in a more exposed situation.

Not that it is either the wisdom or duty of any man to desert his natural situation, or to become a stranger to the refinements of civil life, but it would be prudent to use them as
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we use an high and refined cordial, to rectify and amend the spirits, not to be brought under the power of it.

If therefore dishonouring God and his Sabbaths be a condition or tax upon my being admitted to rank with the fashionable world, I would take the Apostle's advice, *not to mind high things*, nor to let either *height or depth*, or any consideration whatsoever, be able to *separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus*.

If my neighbour put his bottle to me, and urge me beyond reason and moderation, I would assert the right of my constitution and judgment; I would *drink no wine while the world standeth*, nor press it upon others, if I incur the danger of wounding my own conscience, and *making my brother to offend*.

If *filthiness and foolish talking*, or prophane-ness, be the top and spirit of conversation, or to use the words of St. Peter, *If we are vexed with the conversation of the wicked*, 2 Pet. ii. 7. we should maintain the purity and honour of our principles and better judgment, should enter our honest protest against such practices, and if that doth not prevail, we should follow St. Paul's counsel, to *come out from among them and be separate*, 1 Eph. iv. 2. remembering what St. Peter tells us, that we
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are not to live to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

Besides, if the making themselves of some consideration with their company be a motive with any to adopt their vices and follies, they would do well to reflect, that asserting their liberty and doing justice to their own judgments by a steady denial, much more by a seasonable rebuke, must give them the superiority, and in the end will force their esteem, agreeably to that maxim of Solomon, *He that rebuketh a man, shall afterwards find more favour, than he that flattereth with his tongue.* Prov. xxviii, 23.

In short, Do as the son of Sirach exhorteth, *Strive for the truth even unto death, and the Lord shall fight for thee. Accept no man's person against thy soul; and let not the reverence of any man cause thee to fall,* and this upon the same powerful consideration, upon which the Apostle founds his argument, when he cautions his disciples against *walking in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, and the like,* in compliance with those, who (saith he) *think it strange that you run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you, who shall give an account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.*

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LASTLY,

LASTLY, Let it be every man's particular care, that he be not entangled or overcome, as Herod was, by any unwarrantable lust or passion, as no man can say how far its demands upon his conscience, his fortune, and his peace, may in time be carried. Had Herodias been Herod's lawful wife, the Baptist might have lived and been still a favourite. The King would have made free with his oath, had he been free himself. But a bad heart (as I think I have shewn) is always a bad casuist. It is a *lying spirit* in the breasts of the wicked, it shall persuade and prevail also. It binds one sin upon another; and in attempting to mend its condition, generally makes it worse: And how great must its command be, when hypocrisy, perjury, and murder are its instruments!

To conclude, Let us not sacrifice conscience to any consideration whatever. Let us follow the Baptist's example, constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and if occasion require, patiently suffer for the truth's sake.

S E R M O N XIII.

LUKE xii. 20.

But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

YOU have here, in the passage before us, covetousness, folly, and presumption got to their heighth, and very unexpectedly cast down from it. Our blessed Saviour, you see, speaks to men, as men, by instances and similitudes taken from nature and common life, and such as fall within our daily observation. Of this sort was the parable of which my text is the close.

The occasion of it was this: As our Saviour was teaching the multitude, one of the company interrupts him with a request, that

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he would decide a controversy, which was betwixt him and his brother, about dividing their patrimony, which they were desirous to submit to his arbitration. But our Lord being intent upon a business of a very different and a much higher nature, refuseth to intermeddle in such a secular office, and instead thereof informs them by what means they might become enabled to decide it among themselves, namely, by removing the root and first spring of such differences, viz. Covetousness: *Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth:* and takes occasion from this incident to introduce the following parable.

The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods: And I will say unto my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?

vided? Such is the parable, as it was delivered by our blessed Lord, the circumstances and event of which are so striking an instance of human folly, and so common in life, that I hardly know any more affecting or of more general use. I cannot do better therefore, than in the

FIRST PLACE, To lay before you the several circumstances of the parable, or the conduct and character of the person, who is here described by our Saviour. And,

SECONDLY, To apply the same, by shewing the folly and danger of such a conduct.

FIRST then, &c. *The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully.*—Now from the order of the words it should seem, that the person here spoken of was grown rich already, before this fortunate season came; and was one of those, who, in the language of the prophet, had been *joining house to house, and laying field to field*; and the rather as the ground in this place doth more fully signify a large tract of country; a region, or compass of land round about him. This ground is said to *bring forth plentifully*; whether by a distinguished blessing from Heaven at that season, or from the number and extent of his lands, is not precisely said: He had however
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been favoured with large receipts from providence, and was upon that score, deeply a debtor to the laws and duties of gratitude and charity : But how well he had acquitted himself of those obligations may be collected from the account itself, or by fair inference. For he did not do, as goodness and liberality are ever disposed to do, *devise good and liberal things*, Isai. xxxii. 8. He did not think of the poor, the fatherless, and the widow ; nor honour the Lord with the first fruits of his success ; but his first thought appears to have been, what he should do to lodge the vast abundance which he saw pouring in upon him on all sides. The original says, he cast about in his mind, was concerting with himself, what he should do : so that the result at last appears to have been no hasty conclusion ; and it is plain, his whole care was for himself. He had never been wont to impart of his abundance to the poor, or to have compassion on the friendless and distressed, or it would never have escaped him, that there were such claims upon him ; he could never have wanted room where to bestow this increase of his fruits. But he was so wrapt up in dreams of long happiness and independency to come, of its being secure, and, as it were, indefeasible,

sible, that he had not the least doubt of his being as much out of the reach of misfortune himself, as he really was of any feeling of it for others: which led on to that notable resolution; *This will I do*: without taking the will and blessing of God, which gave him those good things, and which alone would insure the continuance of them to him, into his account. *This*, saith he, *will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater*, large enough, no doubt, to contain not only what God had favoured him with already, but such future crops, as he conceived, he had a right to expect, not only in the same proportion, but perhaps in more abundant measure; doing as some thriving people among ourselves are apt to do, counting the good which has already fallen to their share, a sort of pledge and prescription for more and greater—*I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods, and will say unto my soul*, (i. e. when the store-houses and granaries, which he designed to build should come to be full, which he made no doubt, would be the case very shortly,) *Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry*. To such a pitch of security and presumption was he grown already.

But

But the temper and disposition of this man, and how little he thought of or ascribed to God in all this, may be fairly collected from another phrase here used. *There, saith he, will I bestow all my fruits*—The original does not import merely the fruits of the ground, but may signify any thing that we have procured by our own care and management, to which we have an acquired right and title, or which, in the ordinary phrase, we are said to have made ourselves. So that he considered himself, as the author of all this good, and that his own hand had gotten him this wealth: And what wonder, considering that he had no hope or trust in any thing beyond this life, if he resolved to make the most of it, to lay himself out entirely upon Epicurus's plan, and to become one of his herd, to *take his ease, to eat, drink, and be merry?*

Whether this mighty promise to himself of future repose and indulgence, had his date of life been prolonged, would ever have come to pass, there is abundant room to question: for every day's experience may convince us, that this is seldom the case: it is more than probable it would have been with him, as we see it is daily with others, that

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his capacity and disposition for such enjoyments, for *taking his ease, eating, drinking,* and living jovially, would fall off as fast as his wealth increased; that he would be no longer his own master, and much farther from the point proposed, than when he set off at first. But, it seems, he had profited so little by experience and observation of the world, that he was under no apprehension of a disappointment in the case, much less of being taken short that very night; for *God said unto him, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.* Such was, and is the man, who *makes not God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness,* and yields a notable proof, that worldly success naturally begets presumption.

From the parable therefore, as I have considered it on all sides, the children of this world may behold, as in a glass, themselves and their folly according to its several sizes and dimensions. For though presumption be a vice of giant growth, or what the Psalmist calls *the great offence*, yet men do not arrive thither all at once. The man of whom our Saviour speaks in the parable, it
appears,

appears, had been growing rich every day, and was unquestionably some time in advancing to that pitch of arrogance and presumption from which he dropped so unexpectedly, which leads me in the

SECOND PLACE, to apply the same, by laying open the folly and danger of such a proceeding among ourselves, which will best be done by keeping the parable still in our eye, and considering these three particulars :

FIRST, The precariousness and danger of a growing success.

SECONDLY, The uncertainty of the ends we propose to serve by it. And

THIRDLY and LASTLY, The frailty of human life : each of which is pointed out by the parable in question.

FIRST then, Let us consider the precariousness and danger of a growing success. A modest forecast and expectation of having our lawful endeavours crowned with success, strengthened by the uprightness of our motives, the righteousness of the ends we propose to serve by them, and founded in a due submission to the will of God, is one thing : but a launching out into an unbounded reckoning upon what is at a distance, a growing, as it were, upon the goodness of God, and
doing

doing as this man did, thinking within himself *to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof*, is quite different. Indeed it is both reasonable and necessary, *that he who ploughs should plough in hope*: for if hope and expectation were to fail, commerce would be at a stand, nor would the business of civil life go forward, and success is the natural reward of industry. Nevertheless it is well, there are for the most part many rubs and stops in its way: for when it comes fast or frequently on, there are few heads strong enough to bear it. So that we see many instances of wealth, which hath been pouring in upon a man unexpectedly one way, emptying itself as lavishly and unaccountably another. On the other hand, some are of that cast and complexion, that a hasty sun-shine of good fortune, instead of opening their hearts, shall shut them up, nor will any consideration be sufficient to open them ever afterwards. While others to whom Providence hath been kind hitherto in a natural and regular way, on their first setting out in life, soon come to consider their success as an invitation and encouragement to mend their pace, to enlarge their strides, or (as the wise man expresseth it) *to make haste to be rich*, Prov. xxviii. 20. whereas success,

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as the word itself literally imports, is a going on step by step, and in a regular way. But these come at last to interpret these favourable events, as a compliment to their own address and management, and to take the whole as it were out of the hand of Providence into their own. They are grown past fear, and think within themselves, like the rich man in the parable, that *To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.* And thus they go on, till the man is totally altered, and become of quite a different temper and complexion. He who at first setting off was modest and diffident, begins now to look abroad in the world with an air of sufficiency, and perhaps of insolence. He, that was wont every now and then to lift up a grateful heart and eye to heaven upon any particular instance of good fortune, has long ago done with all conversation of that sort. If by the blessing of God his condition be enlarged, *If his ground bring forth plentifully*; if his ship come safe to harbour; if a wealthy lot be fallen into his lap, he thinks every day less and less of that Being who (in the Psalmist's phrase) *enlargeth his steps under him; who giveth the former and the latter rain; who bloweth with his wind*; and in whose

disposal

disposal every Lot, when cast into the lap, most undoubtedly and entirely is. He whose accustomed phrase used to be *if the Lord will,* and by his blessing we will do this or that, *we will go into such a city, and buy and sell, and get gain,* talks now like the dreaming fool in my text, *this will I do.* He that used to be free, open-hearted, and compassionate, is now grown reserved, niggardly, and insensible. In short, he has been thriving upon what was none of his own: For what he was in his more innocent days to set apart for the relief of the poor, for the purposes of religion, as his first fruits to God, and towards the better education of his children, has all gone to enlarge his capital: And, no wonder, if such leaves, added to the lump, should provoke the Almighty to dash him in his career by some unexpected turn of fortune, or take him short in the fulness of his sins and infatuation, with *Tbou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee.*

But should it please God to spare them, such would do well to consider,

SECONDLY, The uncertainty of the end to be served by all this.

The rich man in the passage before us had, as it should seem by our Saviour's manner of
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of introducing it, so little of God in his thoughts, and was so extremely addicted to the world, that he had laid it down as an established maxim with himself, that man's life *doth consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*, and was therefore resolved to make that use of it, *to take his ease, eat, drink and be merry*: But as his life was given him for other and nobler purposes, it was therefore, as the phrase denotes, *required* or rather *redemanded* from him; as what he had no farther occasion for, as what he had made a very ill use of, and to give the world a striking proof, that man's life *doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*, nay, and that very night too, as a standing lesson against presumption, and that we *know not what shall be on the morrow*.

But suppose he had been permitted to go on in his own way; it is far from being clear, that he would have ever arrived at the point proposed. He was not aware, that his spirits now so alert upon the prospect of it, might chance to flag, when they came to enjoy the same. He might *pull down his barns and build greater*, but unless he could prevent his capacities from becoming every day less, would

would he be at all the better? Can it avail a man to have much goods laid up for many years, when the best part of life is past, and those are *drawing nigh, wherein he shall say, I have no pleasure in them?* can he *say to his soul, soul, take thine ease,* when he may be assured by experience, and without going to Solomon for counsel in the case, *That though he be alone, and there is not a second, yea, he hath neither child, nor brother, yet there is no end of his labour?* Can he eat, when digestion grows every day lower and weaker?—Can he drink? Habit (we find) may subsist, when the relish is gone—Will he be merry and jovial, when *the wheel at the cistern,* or circulation begins to slacken: when *fears shall be in the way;* seeing also (as we are told) *the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep?* Besides, may not the gout, the stone, the palsy, or any other malady interpose their protest against all these? But, above all, admit the appetite and the power should continue, can he be sure he shall have an heart to go into these indulgences? And when this master-spring of all ceaseth to act, must not the whole be quite at a stand?

We have had abundant, and some very illustrious evidence without going back to the
days

days of Solomon, and this too upon their own confession, of the truth of what he asserts in his 6th of Ecclesiastes, "That a man to
 "whom God hath given riches, wealth,
 "and honour, so that he wanteth nothing
 "for his soul of all that he desireth, yet
 "God giveth him not power to eat
 "thereof."

But should all his hopes and endeavours be directed towards making a family, or enriching his posterity: It were much to be wished, that a brief history were compiled of the various revolutions of property and shiftings of possession but for the last half century; and the means whereby they were brought about, such as the wastings of extravagance, the encroachments of knavery, and the dextrous management of law, and the like; and I am persuaded, nothing would have a better or a quicker effect towards curing this evil, and convincing mankind, that it is *all vanity and a most unrequiting vexation of spirit*. But there is an argument yet behind, which, independent of what hath been urg'd, is more than sufficient to expose the folly in question, viz.

THIRDLY, That we know not what shall be on the morrow, or the frailty of human life.

life. *This night shall thy soul be required of thee.*

Now of all the various points of light in which this argument hath been laid before men, I know of none half so striking, as what this short parable exhibits to us. To behold a man taken short at one stroke, and in his full age and strength, must be sufficient to shake the most hardned and unthinking: but to consider the very same man, as having devoted all his time and attention to the making a fortune; and, upon finding his *lands to bring forth plentifully*, and his money and ventures to make him regular and ample returns, busying himself in building houses, and covering himself with plantations, and becoming the idol and envy of the neighbourhood, and then dropping in an instant through them all, were it less common than it is, would be an event of all others the most amazing. For a man to have been very wise and anxious in forecasting every the least chance, which may happen to be against him in worldly matters, and yet to leave the only important issue of all quite out of the question, can there be a more glaring absurdity? It is the very finishing of all earthly folly. And yet how many instances do we see, read, or hear of every day? The event, it is true, is not alike to all per-

sons of this cast, but the folly and presumption is the same. The soul indeed of such a one may not be required till the natural time, nor otherwise than in the natural way, and yet his end shall be just as sudden and unprovided for. Death finds him still in the midst of things, and altogether as unconscious of his mortality, as the other. In either case the man departs in haste, and, upon opening his eyes in another world, finds himself like a poor wretch cast naked and forlorn on some unknown coast, a stranger to God, and to the new system of things upon which he is entered; which (to say no worse) he has never had any conception of, and of course can have no mighty relish for.

The prophet Jeremiah, speaking by the same spirit of God, pronounces the end of these men, who are ever intent upon making gain, and, as it must often happen, by methods not over righteous, and brooding over what they have got, to be folly, and illustrates the same by a very lively and apt comparison, (c. xviii. 11.) “As the partridge
 “sitteth upon eggs, and hatcheth them not,
 “so he that getteth riches, and not by right,
 “shall leave them in the midst of his days,
 “and at the end shall be a fool.”

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It ever was a mark of folly not to fix on proper means for the end proposed, or to lay a stress upon that, wherein there is no confidence. To be raising schemes of future felicity and enjoyment upon this frail life, what is it, but building upon the sand! It is working a rich and magnificent design upon a spider's web, nor doth this infatuation rest altogether with the rich and covetous, but extends itself to all sorts and conditions of men, and while we pity and condemn others, we may be liable to the same imputation ourselves.

Having thus expos'd the folly of presumption in the instance before us, by shewing you, **FIRST**, The hazards and precariousness of a growing success; **SECONDLY**, The uncertainty of the ends we propose to serve by it; and, **LASTLY**, The frailty of human life: I shall subjoin a reflection or two from what hath been said.

The caution intended by the parable before us, together with others of like nature and tendency, we acknowledge to be the word of truth; but because it comes to us in the *still small voice* of the Gospel, unaccompanied with any outward circumstances of terror, it is apt to pass off without making any great im-

pression upon us. But it is meditation alone which the Psalmist calls a *communing with our own heart, in our chamber or bed, and being still*, that can digest, and give these affecting truths their proper force and influence upon us. It is meditation alone, which can retain and fix what is apt to pass away, and bring near to us, what has been used to stand afar off. And indeed it is impossible to continue for any short space in contemplating this our precarious state, in looking toward the precipice, and comparing this span of life with an immeasurable eternity, without seeing our folly distinctly and perfectly, and shuddering at the sight. But the misfortune is, we put it aside: we wink with our eyes, and it is gone, and the same idle train of vanity and follies passes on in succession as before.

Now can there be a more egregious infatuation? Can the follies and indiscretions of every other kind in life, though laid together, weigh against this prevailing absurdity! Good God! That men, that christians, who have immortal spirits, whose hopes and expectations are eternal, and for whom there is *a treasure laid up in heaven, that faileth not; bags, that wax not old; the true riches; a*
weight

weight of glory ; an exceeding joy, and so on ; who cannot but know that these felicities have their reverse, that one or the other of these must be every man's portion, and that nothing stands between them, but a frail life, should think so little about it, as in general they are found to do !

We see this man wholly addicted to the world ; that, to his pleasures ; and others appearing, even in these holy places, with a face and posture of neglect and indifference that plainly bespeak a mind wholly void of all attention and concurrence with what is doing. Now doth such a one think, he shall die ? or, that it is possible that in the same night, nay, in the very same moment, in the very same attitude and disposition, his soul may be required of him ? Such would soon be brought to change their course, could they be prevailed upon to consider and to give a serious answer to that exhortation of Job, *Man dieth, and wasteth away, yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he !*

Let us therefore *use this world as not abusing it*, that whenever God shall require our souls, they may be presented *faultless before the presence of his glory*. To whom with the Father, &c.

... of every: an excellent way, and so on,
who cannot but know that these principles have
been reversed; that one or the other of these
must be every man's portion, and that no
other stands between them, but a trial life,
should think to him: about it, in general
they are found to do.

We see this man wholly addicted to the
world: that to his pleasures; and others ap-
parently even in their holy places, with a
love and pursuit of neglect and indifference
of all things, perhaps a mind wholly void of
all attention and concernment with what is
done. Now both these I think he shall
find, that it is possible that in the same
night may in the very same moment, in the
same house, and in the same disposition, his soul
may be separated of him. Such would soon
be brought to change their course, could
they be prevailed upon to consider and to give
a serious answer to that explication of Job,
that he said, and which every man may read
of the Bible, and know it well.
That is therefore, if the words be not mis-
taken, that whenever God shall require our
souls, they may be presented, and shall be
the presence of his glory. To whom with the
Father, &c.

S E R M O N XIV.

PSALM xxxix. 5.

*Lord, let me know my end and the number of
my days, that I may be certified how long I
have to live.*

THERE is scarce any passage in holy scripture which at first sight seems more plain and intelligible, than this of my text; and yet there is hardly any one, the real meaning of which is in general less perfectly apprehended. And this is the more unfortunate, as the doctrine it contains, when rightly understood, is of the utmost importance

tance to all mankind. *Lord, let, &c.* In enlarging upon these words, I propose,

FIRST, To make some observations touching this petition of the royal Psalmist;

SECONDLY, To consider the use and tendency of its doctrine in sundry particulars among ourselves: which, with a short reflection or two, shall be the business of my ensuing discourse. And

FIRST, &c. The prevailing notion concerning these words seems to be, That David is very earnest with his God to be informed of the precise time allotted for his continuance in this world; and thus much indeed the text, as it is translated, seems to imply. But far from this was the Psalmist's intention, as we shall readily perceive, when we come to canvass the petition itself. For David surely could never be ignorant that a request of that kind must be not only unreasonable, but unwarrantable, the subject of it being a secret, which God hath reserved to himself. For although *it is appointed unto all men once to die*, it is necessary, that we wait with all humble and dutiful forbearance, till that *appointed time come*. The very hour of our departure is no more a proper subject of our enquiry,

quiry, than that of the dissolution of the whole system, which there is a bar fixed against all enquiry into. David's meaning then, it may be presumed, was this: Make me, O Lord, to know, i. e. to consider my end and the measure of my days, that I may, by duly meditating thereon, become sensible of how short continuance I am, how soon I may cease to be.

And here I must remark, that in reading the scriptures, it will be necessary in many places, to make proper allowances for the change, which length of time often produceth in the sense and acceptation of words: for want of attending to which, people are apt to run away with the first appearance, and to draw false conclusions from premises, for want of rightly understanding them, as in the case before us.

If a man was now to express a desire to know any particular thing or event, he would, according to the present acceptation of the word, be understood to mean, that he wished to be let into, to be made acquainted with, or made certain of such thing or event; upon which footing it would be very difficult to justify this request of the Psalmist: but
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when we are informed, that not only the word in the original now does, but that that also, which the translators have used, did at the time of translating, signify as well to consider as to be informed of, we shall drop our censure, and approve that as righteous in David, which at first sight appeared to be the height of presumption. And that the word hath this signification, we may be convinced by only turning to the 10th verse of the ninetyeth psalm, even in the later translation; where we read these words, as addressed to the Almighty by his servant David; *who knoweth* (saith he) *the power of thy wrath!* which could mean nothing, but who duly regardeth or considereth that power? And similar to this is the term so often applied to the wicked, that *they know not the Lord*, that is, do not consider or think of him as such.

This, I trust, may be sufficient to clear up the sense of the first part of the text; the whole being no more than what the Royal Author prayed for in another place, namely, *so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* We are clear then as to the first part of the verse.

But what, you will say, could David want

a monitor, a monitor from heaven, to put him in mind of his mortality, and at the very time too, when he was either labouring under some grievous sickness, or sorely afflicted by his enemies, who fought after his life, at a time *when the sorrows of death compassed him, and the pains of hell got hold upon him?* That at such a time he should need the particular assistance of Divine Grace to remind him of his frail and mortal state, may somewhat surprise us.

Now to vindicate the conduct of the Psalmist in this instance, let us consider the case of mankind in general. That the whole race of men should be apprised of their being appointed once to die, was necessary on account of their immortal part, that they might be induced to look forward, and prepare themselves for that interesting event. For were men ignorant of their mortality, it would be absurd to suppose, that any thing beyond this world could have a place in their thoughts.— But then on the other hand, if this knowledge, necessary as it is, was to be constantly impressing itself on the mind, it is easy to be conceived, that it must render every man unfit for the common duties of social life. For if a man could be infallibly assured, that he
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should die at any particular period, suppose that period beyond what is usual in the course of nature, it is not to be questioned, but that it would entirely engross his attention; perhaps render him miserable through his whole life; or at best cast such a damp upon his pleasures, as scarce any man feels from the mere uncertainty of human life. We may therefore conclude, that Almighty God hath, in mercy to mankind, so ordered it, that the thoughts of death should not always be present with us, and that the time of its coming is a veil which cannot be lifted. But then as the depravity of our nature is apt not only to neglect, but to abuse the goodness of God towards us, so is it in this case. The uncertainty of our death as to point of time is a blessing; but then we carry it much farther, than either it was designed we should, or in reason we ought, even to our not thinking of it at all, or at best too superficially to produce its proper effect upon us. Nature indeed makes us recoil at the thought of death; but it is the consciousness of our guilt which renders the reflection upon that solemn hour, when we shall plunge into eternity, so formidable to us.

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No wonder then the holy Psalmist mistrusted himself, and was afraid he should not duly think on the frailty of life, and prepare himself for his end, unless he should be prompted thereto by the Divine Grace assisting him; so long as his corrupt nature made him shrink and withdraw himself from the consideration of so unwelcome an event. But he would not listen to what weak nature might suggest; but the moment he had uttered the words of my text, he enters directly on the consideration of it. "Behold (says he) thou hast made my days as it were but a span long, and mine age is even as nothing in respect of thee, and verily every man living is altogether vanity. For man walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain; he heapeth up riches, and cannot tell who shall gather them." Such was the occasion and design of my text.

Let us see then,

SECONDLY, Of what use and benefit this doctrine is in sundry particulars among ourselves. And let us consider what influence a frequent and serious reflection on the frailty and end of our days will be most likely to

to have upon us, and that in these following respects.

FIRST, In the day of prosperity. Prosperity is very apt to cast all thoughts of this kind at a distance, as foreign and unnatural, and to pronounce them altogether incompatible, and as irreconcilable, to use the prophet's image, as the shadow of night in the midst of noon-day.

But the world is apt to conceive very wrong ideas of prosperity: to consider it as licentiousness, dissipation, and an unbounded enjoyment of the good things of this life. But words are often misapplied. Enjoyment is no loose, indeterminate thing: It requires some restraints to render it the more pure and perfect. The eye when it is lost in an unbounded prospect of sea and sky is rather dissatisfied, is fatigued, and feels not half the pleasure, as when the view is restrained by the lands projecting at their proper distances on either side.

There can be no real enjoyment of any good, without a due respect to the end for which it was bestowed, and to the great end and issue of the whole. There can be no fruition of the present hour, (whatever some may pretend) if it be at the expence of our future

future peace and felicity, or without providing that all shall end right and happily at last.

There are many circumstances of mortality for ever interposing to chastise and repress the insolence of wanton prosperity, and the consideration of our latter end was designed to be the chief controller of all our desires and pursuits, nor the controller only, but an improver too. And were their latter end oftener considered by the gay and the fortunate, were their eyes directed every now and then to this great point of all, it would moderate all their wishes, pursuits, and pleasures, which must necessarily tend to improve, to refine, and prolong them.

We must all be sensible how heedless we are apt to be about the *one thing needful*, the consideration of our future existence, and the passage which must lead thither, when our eyes are dazzled with the splendors of life. It was requisite therefore, that Providence should place this barrier to oppose our hasty pursuits, to awaken our caution, and to restrain that sanguineness of temper which is too apt to compliment itself upon its being secure and out of the reach of controul.

Nor is this the only advantage that will accrue from frequently reflecting on our end; for such reflections are useful

SECONDLY,

SECONDLY, Under the pressures of affliction. It was with this view that the royal Psalmist offered up his petition in the text that he might *know* or duly consider his *latter end*. For under his greatest persecution when his *enemies triumphed over him ungodly*; when he was forced to fly from the wrath of Saul, and hide himself in holes and caverns of the earth,—Then it was the consideration of his latter end, which would put a period to his sufferings (besides its being an opening into heavenly enjoyments) was to keep him from sinking under them by his recollecting that they would last no longer than the short date of human life; a thought which St. Paul gives as the foundation of his patience in adversity; for *our light affliction, saith he, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*. And no doubt David had this heavenly reversion chiefly before his eyes, and the other only as a passage to it. But death, whose inevitable approach will naturally cast a damp on the wantonness of the prosperous, by reminding them of the sure, and, perhaps, approaching dissolution of all their joys, will appear with a quite different face and circumstances to the distressed and the

the miserable, as what will at least soon set them at large from all their sorrows. But,

THIRDLY, Let us suppose ourselves in the very bloom of life, in the full vigour of a healthy constitution: Yet this consideration is by no means unseasonable.

The contemplation indeed of their end seems so very foreign to, and in the course of nature so distant from, this early condition of life, that the young look on it as a kind of absurdity, or impertinence at least, to mention a thing, which (as they think) is of so very little concernment to them. They may, indeed, in some sense, be said in the course of nature to be at a distance from it, through their passion for life and its enjoyments; but they look at it through the wrong end of the glass, which shews the object at a greater distance, than in reality it is. And while they thus flatter themselves, how very fatally must numbers of them be deceived! considering how innumerable the accidents are, by which the best grounded hopes of long life are disappointed, and those who have the best right to expect it, are cut off in the very prime of their days. The want of reflecting upon which, is apt to create in us an unwarrantable confidence and presumption: Whereas

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were this confidence better grounded than it is, were we almost sure of lengthening out our days to a good old age, yet life, alas! even at its greatest stretch, how short is it!

If we look back to the years that are past, how quickly and almost imperceptibly have they slid away! All agree in this; or if some do not at present, yet they most certainly will some time hence. And if by them we are to make a judgment of the years that are to come, how trifling must the utmost term of man's continuance appear, seeing his days are described in holy scripture as *a shadow that passeth away!* How necessary therefore is it that our foolish confidence be tempered and corrected by the thoughts of that frailty, which is the condition of our nature, and that we be taught *to remember* our end, as well as *our Creator, in the days of our youth!*

And if this be necessary, how much more so will it be in the

FOURTH and LAST Place, That we consider the end of our days, when by infirmities of age we are strongly inclining towards the grave. To stand upon the brink of a precipice, and not to see, or consider our danger, would be an amazing infatuation, were it not so common to see old age flattering itself that
much

much of their thread is yet to run, and confiding implicitly in the poor remains of a well-tried constitution, counting full surely that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, and discovering no more thought or apprehension of death than when they were on the other side of forty (which is too notoriously the case.) This looks like a combination to exclude that, which has, at all times, the chief demand upon our consideration. Let me apply this doctrine,

FIFTHLY, To what is commonly called procrastination, or putting off till to-morrow what may be done to-day. And youth is willing enough to allow, that a sober and religious disposition is best suited to the rules of the gospel, but they are for putting off the task of religion, till the heat of their passion is abated, and the natural weight of years shall make them more calm and considerate, and when that time comes, they shall be willing to think of these things, which require sedateness and exertion of thought.

But this were a less misfortune, was this procrastination of our religious duties to be found in youth only: But alas! it grows up

with us, nor are we easily persuaded, that the time proper for repentance and amendment is yet come, even when it is almost too late to enter upon it. Every man indeed knows the utmost stretch of life, which is given to us in general; and cannot but perceive how near he in all probability is to that period: But there is something in the minds of most men, which keeps them from considering it. And as there is no certain time fixed for our dissolution, we are apt to consider it merely as uncertain; but we remember not, that come when it will, we are now at least one day nearer to it, than we were yesterday; and as time steals away from us by moments, and almost imperceptibly, we forget that we are growing old, and so fancy, that we have as much reason to expect to-morrow as yesterday we had to-day. And therefore the task of our lives is still to be postponed, tho' a little consideration might inform us, that we know not what shall be on the morrow, nay, that even this night, our souls may be required from us.

But, SECONDLY, As the generality look short of their great end, so there are too many who, in a worldly sense, may be said to look

too far beyond it: And though widely different in their aim, both miss of the mark.

It is a well judg'd piece of advice which the wise man gives us in the 23d chapter of his Proverbs, *withhold not good from them, to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it. Say not unto thy neighbour, Go, and come again to-morrow, and I will give thee, when thou hast it by thee.*

There is, methinks, a very strange and unaccountable turn of mind, which is very frequently to be met with, viz. That a man exceedingly well inclined to do good offices of charity and benevolence, and who hath it at the same time in his power to put his good designs in execution, shall yet by a procrastinating sort of spirit, and by a false reckoning upon life, or for want of thinking on his mortality at all, be diverted from his design for the present, though his purposes remain good for the future. Hence it is, that we see so many traces of a well intended charity in the wills of those persons, who postpone the perfecting of them, until it is too late; and so many bequests in those of others, who put off their intended bounty to certain objects, till they are past receiving it. The unreasonableness of such proceeding is very evi-

dent: For if such or such particular acts of charity are wanted, the sooner those wants shall be supplied, the more serviceable these acts of charity will be; nay, the delaying of them is a sort of cruelty, inasmuch as in such a case ten thousand accidents may happen either to the object of our charity, or our abilities to perform it. The man who is to-day miserable, may, for want of present relief, be out of all power of reaping the benefit to-morrow. But if that should not be the case, and the miserable object should yet remain, and in the same unhappy state, what a cruelty is it, to have suffer'd him to continue thus so long, when we had it in our power to relieve him! and the more so still, if we consider what a change even in our own circumstances, in our own life, and even in our own will and inclination, a day may bring forth.

LASTLY, By a frequent and religious consideration of our end, and familiarising the same to our thoughts or not, we have it in our power to make death in a great measure what we please, to render it an harmless inoffensive thing; at least to restrain its operations merely to the outward man. Its gate will be strait or easy, a dread or delight, a blessing or a curse, as we are disposed to make it.

it. The terrors which are placed about it, are for the most part the work of our own hands. By discarding all thoughts of it, we give it an additional power over us and a quicker march against us; and lay up but so much in store to make its bitterness more bitter: Whereas the contemplation of it must do good at all times, being that to which every duty, every act of self-denial bears respect. It hath an influence upon all the motions of our hearts, and (if we will permit it) all the actions of our lives. To conclude:

The present solemn season was intended to put a stop for a time to that incessant round of pleasure and indulgence, of feasting and dissipation, which, if left to itself, would leave no breathing space from one year's end to another, and to make room for better thoughts and considerations, for religious and wholesome meditation. The church hath appointed it not more as a duty, than for our good. But if you are resolved to join this also to the rest of the year, and to misapply these returning opportunities for recollection and a wise preparation of the heart, think what your portion must be in the end, and how soon that end
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may come. You have no security for this very night; nay, though as Solomon observes, you should *live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.*

S E R M O N

The present solemn season was intended to put a stop for a time to that incessant round of pleasures and indulgence, of feasting and drinking, which, if left to itself, would leave no breathing space from one year's end to another, and to make room for better thoughts and considerations, for religious and wholesome meditation. The church hath appointed it not more as a duty, than for our good. But if you are resolved to join this also to the rest of the year, and to multiply these returning opportunities for recollection and a wise preparation of the heart, think what your portion must be in the end, and how soon that end may

S E R M O N XV.

PSALM xxxvii. 25.

*I have been young, and now am old: yet saw
I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed
begging their bread.*

AMONG all the truths recorded in the Sacred Writings there is, perhaps, hardly any, which carries such a face of improbability with it, as this in my text. For is the course of the world so exactly and accurately ordered, that righteousness and prosperity, wickedness and poverty must be inseparable companions? Is virtue never in distress? Among the multitudes that are in
want

want are there *none righteous, no, not one?* This surely is not to be supposed, for daily experience sheweth us the contrary.

But if so, if virtue and want are very frequently, however unsuitably, link'd together, how cometh it to pass, that David should say, he *never saw the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread?* To clear up which difficulty it may be proper in the

FIRST place, to make a short observation or two upon what the Psalmist hath here asserted, by which the seeming improbability of it may be removed.

SECONDLY, to consider how far this assertion advanced by David under the law, will hold good under the gospel dispensation.

And then I shall apply what has been said, to the occasion of my appearing before you at this time. And,

FIRST, I am to make a short observation or two upon what the Psalmist hath here asserted, by which the seeming improbability of it may be removed, And

FIRST, I observe, that by the word Righteous may be understood not only a just and honest,

honest, but a liberal and charitable man, for so it follows immediately after my text, *the righteous is merciful and liberal; the righteous is merciful and lendeth*, with much more to the same purpose.

SECONDLY, It has been asserted that the author perhaps might not mean quite so much as the words seem to imply. He might not design to be understood in a strict and literal sense, but as using a well-known figure of speech, by which it is common in all, more especially the Eastern languages, to heighten their expressions, not with any intent to deceive, but merely in compliance with the custom of the country, or to give an additional weight and strength to their argument. And then the whole of what the Psalmist asserts will amount only to this, that according to his experience in the world, it was a thing very uncommon, or what he had very rarely met with, that a man of known integrity and distinguished beneficence should be suffered to sink so low in distress, to be so entirely destitute of all assistance, as to be driven to the very extremity of want, even to the begging his bread. But neither do I like this way of qualifying scripture texts, as common as it may be ;
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for the word of God can never stand in need of such poor helps. In short, to understand my text aright, we need only to consider the difference between the Christian covenants and that under which the Psalmist lived. For as that under which he lived was in great measure temporal (and yet they who were Jews in the spirit and not in the letter, looked beyond it to blessings of a higher nature) so the sanctions or rewards which enforced it, were temporal also, as is plain from the Old Testament in general, and especially from the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, where the rewards and blessings of legal obedience are very fully and particularly recited, that *they should be blessed in the city, and blessed in the field, blessed in the fruit of their body, and blessed in the fruit of their ground*, with a great deal more to the same purpose.

And again, chap. ii. 7. *The Lord thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand, — These forty years the Lord thy God hath been with thee, thou hast lacked nothing*, exactly to the words of the Psalmist in my text!

And therefore it is not to be wondered at, that the uprightness and goodness of all true Israelites

Israelites should secure both them and their children from want, and entitle them to a general course of prosperity, as things then stood. Since beside the natural tendency that virtue hath to raise up friends in time of need, there was then the express declaration of the Almighty himself to assure them of it. There was then a general promise (as I have shewed you) that they should be, and for the most part they were, attended with success. In short, we find throughout the whole history of that people, that while the ungodly, as the Psalmist describes it, were *cut down like the grass, and withered even as the green herb, they that trusted in the Lord, and were doing good, dwelt long in the land, and were plentifully fed. They were not confounded in the perilous times, but even in the days of dearth they had enough.*

So that upon the whole there is in reality nothing either impossible or improbable in what the Psalmist hath here asserted, provided the assertion be but rightly understood.

Beggars no doubt there were, even in the days of Israel, either thro' their own idleness, or the fraud and wickedness of others. Thus we read of *the bread of idleness*, and of *begging their bread*, as a curse, Psalm cix. but in respect

respect of the former the righteous cannot be supposed to have been of that number, idleness being altogether incompatible with that character. And if they became so thro' the fraud or wickedness of the ungodly, he tells us in my text that he *never knew them forsaken*, for (as he observes in the verse immediately before) *tho' he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.*

Indeed the original word in my text does not necessarily signify *begging their bread*, but the import of what David says is this: That he never saw the righteous after seeking, labouring or striving for bread, after putting forth their honest and best endeavours to that end, at a loss to obtain it.—But of this enough. Proceed we in the SECOND place, to consider how far this observation under the law will hold good under the gospel dispensation.

And here it must be owned, that a righteous or a good Christian hath not the same reason to expect that his deeds shall be crowned with plenty, or worldly prosperity, as a righteous Jew formerly had; and that for this plain reason, because wealth or affluence

ence is not any part, any essential part of the gospel covenant; whereas of the Mosaical it evidently was. In short, there are no other treasures, which the faithful Christian can certainly depend upon as the stipulated reward of his virtue, but those which are laid up for him in Heaven: And therefore the motives to obedience, which chiefly influenced the Jews, must have been very different from what we Christians ought to have principally in view. The lot of their inheritance was an earthly Canaan here below: But we are to *seek those things which are above*. Theirs was present, sensual, temporary: Ours future, spiritual, and eternal. Except it be that complacency of mind, that silent, but sincere satisfaction, which every generous breast enjoys as the natural and immediate effect of doing good, and which will yield a good mind more pleasure in prosperity, and more comfort in adversity, than all that wealth or power can give, even to their most favoured and successful votaries.

Nevertheless, let it be observed, that tho' poverty and plenty are not so essential a part of the Christian covenant as of the Jewish, nevertheless *Godliness* certainly is, we are told, *profitable for all things, for the life that now is,*

is, as well as that which is to come. And though the Jews had indeed greater, yet great reason hath every faithful, more especially every charitable Christian to hope for a competent share at least of the blessings of this life, as well as that which is to come. For there are but two ways by which the goods of this world are to be obtained: either, **FIRST**, In the natural and ordinary course of things, which is commonly called the course of nature, or, **SECONDLY**, by the extraordinary interposition of Divine Providence.

If by the natural course of things, indeed that, it must be owned, will not be always favourable to the righteous and the good, since we are not to expect miracles, and evil principles will produce their proper effects, according to their true nature and tendency. Thus fraud and subtlety will be naturally too hard for and over-reach an honest simplicity; and unsuspecting innocence may frequently fall a sacrifice to artful villainy. And so in other respects. But yet on the other hand, virtue will have its natural effect too, as well as vice; as the good are really and at the bottom more esteemed, and more readily confided in, even
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by those of a different character, than such as are partakers with them in their iniquities, there must of course be much less likelihood, that the truly virtuous, more especially those who do good to others, should fail of success, and be oppress'd with want, than there is, that the same should happen to the wicked, the injurious, and uncharitable, and the like, provided that in other respects they are equal, which, in order to make a fair comparison, ought always to be supposed.

But on the other hand, if we suppose that the affairs of this world are not suffered to depend entirely upon the events of natural causes; if there be a particular Providence, which secretly indeed, but most effectually overrules the general powers and laws of nature, as occasion may require, who then can be a more proper object of the Divine Favour than the generous and good? than those who are steadily and considerately determined to relieve the necessities and promote the welfare of their fellow-creatures, as far as the compass of their abilities, and circumstances of their affairs shall enable them to do? who are bountiful when occasion requires, or the influence of a good example is wanted?

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There are millions of ways in which the good Providence of God may do this, even in this life, even in the ordinary course of worldly circumstances. He may pour down his blessings on such persons with an invisable hand, and whatever they may do, or undertake, he may make it to prosper. Our observation will furnish us with many instances, reading and history with abundantly more. Nay, who can tell without looking back a great way farther than we are able to do, whether many of those who appear in this place, and upon this occasion, in support of this good work, and are enabled so to do through their happier circumstances, may not in fact be more indebted to the righteousness of some one or more of their family gone before them, than to their own best foresight and most diligent endeavours?

To concur with these ends of Providence, which operate by the labours of some, by the affluence of others, and by the benevolence of all, we have brought these poor children before you.

Whether their parents or those who went before them were righteous or otherwise it is neither easy nor necessary for us to know. To say who is rich or poor among us is
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speaking of what perhaps may have fallen within our knowledge ; but to say who among the generations past was good or bad, must in general (for many righteous have gone to their graves unobserved) be a matter quite out of our reach. Whether I say their parents were righteous or otherwise, what their merits or demerits have been, are secrets from us ; but as our merciful God dealeth with mankind *according to what they have, not according to what they have not* ; as the world is continually shifting, as in this respect also *one generation passeth away and another cometh* ; as prosperity and rank are variable things, those who were low in the world, are daily getting upwards, and those who were high in it are going downward, so that no man can in general know what has been, merely by what is before him ; it is not at all impossible but you may be ministers in the hand of Providence, of fulfilling the doctrine of my text.

Add to this, that while you are instruments of good to these little ones whom God careth for ; you are actually laying a foundation of good to future generations in your own families, who may hereafter be the better for what you do now, agreeably to that

of the son of Sirach, who speaking of good and pious persons of old, saith, *these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten, their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes.* The Almighty makes use not only of the good dispositions, but even the divisions, disputes and contentions of others, in favour of the righteous, who are never out of his sight.

A considerable number of these poor children, from the first establishment of this charity, have, thro' the good Providence of God, working by your bounty, been defended from the fate of begging their bread, and all the evils incident to that way of living.

What else could have prevented them from being swallowed up and lost amidst the dregs of the people? from being drawn in to work that which is evil, to commit uncleanness, to kill, to steal, to bear false witness, and to dishonour their native country, by an unrighteous supply of their necessities and vices abroad, or from wounding her by riots and robberies at home? For let us look round us, and we may observe in those of the common sort among us, of whose education little

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or no care has been taken, what a meanness and malignity of aspect, what rudeness of speech and behaviour, what a promptness to every sort of mischief betrays itself, as if they were born near the Pole, or among the wild beasts of the forest.

To reduce the number of these in general, and more especially within your own precincts, hath been your wise and laudable aim and endeavour. And indeed to trace the happy effects of your bounty, together with that of other like institutions, thro' its natural and necessary consequences, would be to carry our eye forwards thro' a great extent and compass: For consider the good that hath been already done, that so large a number have been hereby rescued from the snares of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and put into a way of ministring with their own hands to their future necessities, and avoiding that canker, sloth and idleness, which adheres so closely to the lowest sort among us. Consider, I say, the good that hath been done, and then multiply the same by the ordinary rules of proportion, inasmuch as they who have been taught themselves will be most likely to teach their children, and one generation becometh in this respect a
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sort of security for the next, who can say how far the blessed effects of what has been done, and of what you are going to do, may reach? None, but that Being, who knoweth all things, and will doubtless reward it in proportion, nay seven fold. For as he, who ventures upon a bad action, must be answerable for all the mischiefs that may accrue from it, even though he should not foresee or design it all, so he who layeth a foundation of good to his fellow-creatures, hath an unquestionable title to the reward of all the good that may arise from it, even tho' he should not have foreseen or intended it all. Nay more, such is the nature of these wise charities, that they are hourly adding something to the reward of those who promote them, even after they themselves are in their graves, to make them in some sort to survive themselves, and to be doing good thro' many generations to come, nay perhaps to the end of time.

Is it not reasonable therefore to conclude that the children and dependants of such pious persons will be regarded by Providence with an eye of peculiar favour and attention; and tho' misfortunes, thro' their own frailty or the wickedness of others, or for the exercise

cise of their virtue and patience, should befall them, that they shall never be forsaken or *utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth them with his hand?*

These children, it is true, may many of them be dispersed, and cannot know in a complicated charity, like this, the particular hands which reached it out to them, and therefore such cannot perhaps have an opportunity of yielding you those returns of honour and service, which are your due. But the same generous disposition will look upon their thriving in the world, their living honestly, soberly and chastely, and answering the ends and purposes of the givers, as an abundant recompence,

But tho' these little ones should not be able hereafter to know and reverence their several benefactors, yet as such benefactors are God's representatives to these poor children, so Almighty God will be the representative of these poor children to their benefactors, and will repay them seven fold into their bosom.

Nay, he may requite you perhaps in kind. For as many of these little ones may grow up to be cotemporaries with your children,
who

knows, but by a train of unforeseen circumstances, some of them may become instruments of yielding you or yours a serviceable requital? Events of this nature have been known: And I make no doubt, but if the whole scheme of Providence were to be unravell'd and laid open before us, we should find numberless instances of this sort, which at present escape every eye but his, who is *wonderful in his doings towards the children of men.*

Nay in the ordinary course of things the services, which these poor objects in the way they are placed out, will be enabled to yield, are already visible among yourselves; for many of those who were educated in this school now live comfortably within your own precincts, and those now are preparing to be instruments in promoting the growing wealth of the kingdom in general, and of some perhaps in your own neighbourhood in particular.

However doubt not of a return of your pieties, nor of the zeal and care of those to whose management they have been committed. All has been done, that past circumstances

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cumstances would allow : All will be done, that the present or the future shall admit of.

What then remains, but that to use the words of the Apostle, *Whereunto ye have already attained, ye walk by the same rule, ye mind the same thing?* And from what is past, it is but reasonable to conclude (to use the same applicable words) *that he who hath begun this good work in you will perform or finish it, even as it is meet to think thus of you all, and that thro' the blessing of God upon your bounty, the poor of these places will never be forsaken, nor their seed begging their bread.*

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XVI.

MATTH. viii. 8, 9.

The centurion answered and said, Lord I am not worthy that thou should'st come under my roof: but speak the word only and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, go, and he goeth; to another come, and he cometh, and to my servant do this, and he doth it.

W HATEVER objections may lie against parts of the Old Testament, or rather its translation, in point of difficulty, there being sundry places from whence the veil is not yet removed, the doctrines of our Saviour, as recorded by the Evangelists, have little or no shade upon them:
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They lie level enough to a common capacity, if that capacity be exerted as it may and ought to be. But too many are apt to read them negligently, or to give them a careless hearing, and so lose the spirit, the connexion, and the good uses they were intended to serve. This is the case, I say, with too many. For to those, who are acquainted with the genius and manner of these writings the ensuing explanation must be superfluous, and by consequence not design'd for such. The uses however which it will afford, may be of service to all. The passage of my text therefore, I propose in my present discourse,

FIRST, To consider and explain:

SECONDLY, To make such use of it as the several circumstances thereof shall suggest. And,

FIRST, &c. *When Jesus enter'd into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented; and Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him.*

Now in the account which St. Luke gives of this transaction there seems to be some variation.

variation. St. Matthew tells us, *there came unto him a centurion* ; and yet St. Luke represents this centurion as sending the elders of the Jews to Christ, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant. Most expositors would fain account for this upon that common principle, that what a man does by another, he may be said to do himself. But what need of this ? The matter may be easily reconciled without it. His sending friends to Christ with his request, does not prove that he did not go out to meet him. For both may be true.—His sending other persons to our Lord seems to speak the humble consciousness of his own unworthiness ; and yet upon our Lord's approach to his house, he might think of his duty to go out to meet his divine guest, and to wait in the place of honour to give him a proper reception.

The centurion, who it is plain from what follows, was now a believer, or something very near it, and looked upon our Lord as a divine person, being overwhelmed (as it should seem) by such unexpected condescension, answered and said, *Lord I am not worthy that thou should'st come under my roof, but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed:*
for

for I am a man also under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, go, and he goeth; to another, come, and he cometh; and to my servant, do this, and he doth it.

Now some people who are careless hearers, (as I said before) or run these matters hastily over, may be apt, from these last words, to consider this centurion, as meaning to do himself honour; to set himself forth as somebody of consequence, thereby to induce our Saviour the more readily to comply with his request, and to heal his servant. But how will they reconcile this with what goes immediately before, where the centurion openly disavows any such pretensions by declaring, with the most profound humility, that he was not worthy, that our Lord should even come under his roof?

This humility was the more meritorious (tho' the centurion might not think so) because it should seem, that he was a person of some consequence, by his sending the elders of the Jews on his errand. His being an officer in the Roman army proves he was a heathen by profession; his faith therefore in Christ was the more extraordinary; it implies that his mind was open to conviction; that

that he had an honest and good heart, and was *not far from the kingdom of God*. Why, else, should he love the Jewish nation so far as to build them a synagogue? it was enough that he protected them, but to build them a synagogue too, was carrying his regard for them a great way indeed. But he had been ('tis probable) introduced by his conversation with the Jews to the knowledge of the one true God, and became thereby the more deserving of a farther revelation.

In approbation, therefore, of so pious and promising a disposition, our Saviour instantly complies, saying, *I will come and heal him*; and we are told, verse 6. that *Jesus went with them*.

That he believed Christ to be a divine person is evident from the argument he useth, *Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*. Nay, that he believed him to be the Messiah, and to have come forth from God, almost necessarily follows from the argument itself: *For I also*, said he, *am a man under authority*, or sent by commission from others, *and I say to this man, go, and he goeth*, and so on.

Now Christ we know is spoken of, in Scripture, as *sent forth from God*, as *come forth*

forth from the father, as receiving authority to execute judgment, JOHN v. 27, as opening the eyes of the blind, ejecting evil spirits, stilling the waves of the sea, and raising the dead with a word only. The centurion therefore argued very justly,—For I also, said he, am a man under authority, but mine is a command merely human, a limited power, liable to be overuled or superseded, and yet I say to this man, go, and he goeth; to another, come, and he cometh, and to my servant, do this, and he doeth it.—How much easier then must it be for him, whose authority is divine, whose voice also the hosts of heaven, the powers of hell, the gates of death, and all the operations of nature hear and obey! What need he do more than merely to speak the word and my servant shall be healed?

Having thus set before you the meaning and intent of the passage before us, I shall go on to shew,

SECONDLY, What uses the several circumstances of it will afford.

FIRST then from our Saviour's ready compliance, it is observable how gracious and acceptable, in the sight of God, must a religious humility be in persons of power and station

station in the world. The love of power seems, and indeed is generally allowed to be the most prevailing passion in the human breast. Most other appetites and desires, tho' they appear to be directed to other objects, are nevertheless but ministers under this; and no condition of life is so low and insignificant but loves to lord it over its fellows. Even avarice itself, though it affect to shun all outward appearances, and such things as attract the eyes and veneration of the world, is much belied by the notion we have of its self-denial. It aims at power and command as much as any, and is generally successful.

If then the love of power be so universal a principle in the human heart, and be so impatient of control; if in the midst of all that devotion which is paid a rich or a great man by the people about him, he can humble himself before his God, he must have more virtue in him than falls to the share of numbers of his own rank and authority. For a mind that is ever looking upwards, a heart that is lifted up day by day, from one degree of pride and conceit to another, is apt to lose sight, by degrees, of its obligations, together with those necessary differences

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and distinctions, those limits and boundaries, which a good understanding and a well-disposed mind will ever discern and preserve, and which ignorance and error are sure to overlook or confound.

It is remarked of one great man who stands upon record, as being possess'd of a most commanding genius, and one of the most exalted stations, that yet in the heights of office and power, he was not so presuming upon either as to forget himself and his duty to heaven; saying of himself, that "while he ascended before men, he descended in humiliation before God."

Every virtue indeed hath merit, in proportion to the difficulties and temptations it hath to encounter; a religious humility therefore in the breasts of persons of station and power must be the more pleasing to the Almighty, and meet with a more propitious, and immediate reception and return. The centurion, tho' he could say to another *go, and be goeth*, and so on, had not forgotten that there was one whose power is infinite, *neither* (according to Job) *is there any number of his armies*. He could distinguish between a short and delegated commission, and a di-
vine

vine authority, to which all the hosts of heaven and earth were obedient, and therefore obtained that ready condescension and declaration of our Lord, *I will come and heal him.*

SECONDLY, There was another inducement to our Saviour's compliance with our centurion's request, and which may furnish matter for imitation, and that was loving the Jewish nation, so far as to build them a synagogue. There is certainly a very favourable disposition in Providence towards those who love and promote good works. Doing good to individuals hath merit (if any thing man can do, may be so called) and every one may do something in this way: but the setting on foot foundations of good that shall take in numbers, and extend to future times, can be the work of but few only in comparison. A man, who out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth these good things, and upon a right principle, will receive a blessing from heaven for every individual whom his bounty hath rescued, or would fain rescue from impiety, ignorance, or distress. Not a single one will be omitted in God's account, as well those who have neglected or abused the benefit, as those who have received

and improved the same; for his intentions were good towards them all. Such a one in the Apostle's apt expression *layeth a good foundation for himself against the time to come*, and that too a wide foundation as well as a sure one.

But the chief end of doing good is the honour and service of God. Charity therefore to the bodies of men must be intended to restore them to their religious as well as their bodily functions, that they may not only *labour with their hands, working the thing that is good*, but may serve the Lord without distraction. Doing good extends, or ought to do so, to both parts of man, his soul as well as his body; or rather to the latter as minister to the former. Planting therefore charitable foundations for sick and lame in our several counties, is so far right, as it affects the bodies of men; but the centurion's love to the Jewish nation was proved by his building them a synagogue, by ministering to their spiritual occasions. The making of laws and other provisions therefore against popery, prophaneness and immorality, and at the same time leaving the face of a country so bare of churches, and its inhabitants by consequence in a mere state of nature,

can such wisdom or goodness be consistent with itself? Make men religious, by providing the proper means for their becoming such, and you remove great part of that attention to their bodies: for many become sick and lame through their vices, which a regular course of religion would in good measure prevent.

THIRDLY, From the behaviour of the centurion, I observe, that wherever faith is, there is humility. This centurion, though naturally well disposed, yet as an heathen, a Roman soldier and a commander, from the nature of the service he was in, and the powers of his commission, from an habit of commanding on his part, and of the most implicit obedience on that of others, must, one would think, have been much out of the way of this virtue, humility, in which nevertheless he had made so surprising a progress. But he had seen our Saviour's mighty works. He had beheld many of those powers of nature which he had been used to worship, put under controul, or reversed. He was convinced that the hand which did all this must be divine. He saw almighty power and goodness working together; and presently the hardness of the soldier, with the pride of
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of the commander, was exchang'd for the humility of a christian; an humility, however, at no time incompatible with military command, or the truest bravery. Conscious of his former ignorance and blindness, of his unworthiness as a heathen, and perhaps of some licentiousness too in the course of a military life, he was struck with our Lord's condescension. He never saw things in that light before, nor did the lowly appearance of our Saviour hinder him from acknowledging himself to be unworthy to receive so illustrious a guest, or even to go unto him.

The transition from what he had been to what he was now become, was so extraordinary, and at the same time so sincere, that our Lord gave him as extraordinary a testimony, saying to those that followed him, *verily I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*

While men converse with men only, with those of like passions with themselves, it cannot be but it must continually minister to pride. But when they come to acquaint themselves with God, to be impress'd with due apprehensions of divine power, and (what must operate with more force upon an ingenuous mind) the divine goodness too, *its*
length

length and depth, and breadth and height—its length, from before the world began to endless ages—its depth, the humble state our Lord descended to—its breadth, as comprehending all mankind from first to last—and its height, that from whence Christ descended to advance us thither.—When a christian looks over this awful scene, where must pride be? The only strife then will be, who shall be most humble. Indeed whatever a proud man may be in other respects, no stronger evidence can be given, of his being a stranger to the first rudiments of christianity. Another and a

FOURTH use suggested to us by the conduct of the centurion, is a caution to us whenever we receive any mercies from Providence, to receive the same with humility.

The particulars which are apt to beget pride in the heart of men, are those endowments of nature or fortune, which Providence hath favour'd them with, which however are and ought to be the strongest reasons and arguments against it; for when men lie under so great obligations, they have just as much reason to be proud, as a man has who is deeply in debt,

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Our centurion did not interpret our Lord's ready compliance with his request as a compliment due to his station and authority: It had quite a different effect upon him. He did not think the more highly of himself upon that account. It humbled him so much in his own sight, that he proclaimed his unworthiness to go to Christ, much more that Christ should come to him. He look'd upon himself no longer as an object of respect and consequence, but as an ignorant heathen, as having lived hitherto in all the pollutions of the world, as an object rather of divine power and wrath, than of favour and condescension.

Let every man therefore, who can command the world about him, and the good things thereof, wisely remember from whom he received his commission, how little he has deserved it, and under how much greater controul he is himself. The world is never more mistaken than when it permits their many favours from Providence to beget in them thoughts of pride and independency. We should consider every new mercy as a fresh reproach upon our sins, and a new witness to our ingratitude; and if matters were rightly weighed, men have more cause

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to be humbled, when the Almighty is pleased to visit them with his favours, than with his severities. You have been taught, that afflictions are often blessings in disguise. The same may be said of earthly goods, when they come pouring in upon us, that in them is often concealed a plague and a punishment. Gratitude implies humility in the party obliged to his benefactor, a submission of his whole heart and hands to his service, and the more in proportion to the scantiness of his pretensions to such goodness,

Let us look then through life to the blessings we have received, the evils we have committed, and the unthankful returns we have made, and pride cannot stand before them so long as the prospect continues, but the vanities and engagements of the world soon remove it from our sight.

FIFTHLY, Another lesson we may learn from the behaviour of the centurion, is a tenderness and regard to our servants and dependents, especially in sickness and distress. A flow of prosperity, an high station, and a command over others, too often, and in too many amongst us, produce an hardness and insensibility to the wants and necessities of the lower part of their households; and those
who

who are every moment of their lives within our call and disposal, are many times the farthest removed in their distress from our compassion and regard. But it could never be designed by Providence, that the power of doing good should be placed so far beyond the reach of its fittest objects. Our centurion appears to have been one of a different cast: Though he could say to this man, *go, and he goeth; to another, come, and he cometh; and to his servant, do this, and he doeth it*, he knew his own duty to them too: His servant's situation and sufferings now claimed attention on his part; nor did he think his concern for a faithful domestic any diminution to his spirit, or to the dignity of his commission.

Greatness many times shews better in little things, than in things of its own size. It is the son of Sirach's advice, *whereas thy servant worketh truly, i. e. faithfully, entreat him not evil*; nay, he goes farther, and saith, *let thy soul love a good servant*: our centurion did so: for we read in the account which St. Luke has given us of this matter, that *his servant was dear unto him*.

A christian should be *faithful* (as Moses was) *in all his house*; should let no part there-
of

of be without the reach of his care and attention: Should minister to their spiritual wants, as well as those of their bodies; should relieve their ignorance as well as their diseases; that after their having ministered so much to their master's ease and convenience in this life, they may yet by their improvements in the knowledge of God, and in the practice of their duty, which they received from them, minister moreover to the increase of their reward in another and a better,

Upon the whole: Let us follow the pattern in my text, and remember, that no man is made less by his humility. Pride is from weakness and ignorance. It is our knowing no more than we do, that causeth it. The wiser men grow, and the more enlightened they are, the humbler will they always be. I speak not of mere human wisdom and learning, for with them it is as often otherwise. Humility opens the door to every improvement; whereas pride shuts it against them all. Before we can go to Christ by faith and true devotion, pride must be subdued. But, alas! there is no vice cleaves more closely to our nature, or pursues it through all conditions and circumstances of it, than pride.

pride. There are vices indeed peculiar to some times, some professions, some stations in life, some countries and climates; but this vice is so universal, that it seems to be not so much a disease of the mind, as a constituent part of it. This however must be put off and laid aside, before we can attain to the knowledge of Christ, or a title to his promises, agreeably to that of the wise man, *the fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom, and before honour is humility.*

S E R M O N XVII.

ROMANS ix. 20—I.

Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?

The context runs thus:

Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say unto him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not, &c.

THE immediate design of the Apostle in this chapter was to assert the honour and justice of God, in his proceedings with the posterities of Abraham and Isaac, of Jacob and Esau, with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and the whole Jewish nation, from the beginning to the day of christianity. But as the argument here brought in defence of
God's

God's proceedings in a public and national way, may be extended also to private life, I shall consider the same in a more general view, and shew the justice of the expostulation in my text in respect to both. *Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God, &c.* In order to which I propose,

FIRST, To consider the fitness and propriety of the image here used.

SECONDLY, The drift of the Apostle in the passage before us, and

THIRDLY, To apply the same to the various estates and conditions in private life. And

FIRST, &c. *Hath not the potter power over the clay, to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?*

This image then so expressive of the power of the creator over the work of his hands, the work of his fingers, is frequently applied and alluded to in other parts of the Old and New Testaments. Job, we find, in his usual style and liberty of complaint, expostulating with God, *thine hands have made me and fashioned me round about, yet thou dost destroy me: Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as* the

the clay, and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

The Psalmist seems to have had this in his eye, where he confesseth the divine power in his formation.—*Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me, (namely) when I was curiously wrought in the lower parts of the earth. And again, thy hands have made me and fashioned me.* Thus the prophet Isaiah (lxiv. 8.) introduceth the church, as deprecating the wrath of God—*thou art our father, we are the clay, and thou the potter, and we all are the work of thy hands: Be not wroth with us very sore!*

Jeremiah displays God's disposing power in raising up or casting down, in marring, restoring, or changing the condition of his people under the same lively figure. *Then I went down (saith he) to the potter's house, and behold he wrought a work on the wheels, and the vessel that he made of clay, was marred in the hand of the potter: So he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter, saith the Lord: Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel!*

Their

Their dissolution and destruction, together with all that oppose the gospel, is set forth in the Psalms, in the prophecy of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and in the book of Revelations, by *dashing them in pieces like a potter's vessel.*

Our Apostle had unquestionably in his view that passage in the prophecy of Isaiah, *Wo unto him, that striveth with his Maker: Shall the clay say unto him that fashioneth it, what makest thou?* With many other instances, too many to be recited.

Now tho' every thing, which is dictated by the spirit of God, cannot fail of being precisely just and exact in every particular, there is however hardly any thing of the kind, where the particulars of the comparison coincide better, or run more in a parallel, than that in my text, considering the original of man, as Job expresses it, *made and formed out of the clay*; if we survey this artificer sitting at his work, and, as the wheel goes round, with an easy address and the most commanding touch, causing the same to grow up under his hand, or bringing it back to what it was before, raising or sinking it, widening or contracting it; and when compleat making it pass by a quick transition

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tion into another form ; rendering it *a vessel to honour or dishonour*, as seemeth good to him to make it.—Thus far of the fitness and propriety of the image in my text.—Proceed we, in the

SECOND place, to consider the Apostle's drift in the passage before us.

We find him lamenting the condition of his unbelieving brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh, and carrying his wishes for their conversion far beyond the power of modern faith and zeal to comprehend at the third verse : But in order at the same time to recover them from a fond mistake into which they had fallen, that because they were Israelites, *to whom pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the Promise, whose were the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came*, they had an unalienable right to the word of promise, and thought themselves hardly dealt with, that the Gentiles should go into the kingdom of God before them. And this he doth by telling them that *they are not all Israel, which are of Israel, neither because they are of the seed of Abraham are they all children, but in Isaac shall thy seed be called*,

i. e. They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but *the children of the promise* made to Isaac (or those who embrace the promise in Christ by the gospel) *are counted for the seed.*

The Jews were the chosen people of God, taken from out the bulk or lump of mankind, and erected into a separate system and nation: and so long as they continued in their obedience, they were (as the prophet Hosea seems to imply) *a vessel in which he had pleasure*; but when they had broken faith, and were polluted with idols, the vessel was marred, God had no pleasure in it; they were dashed in pieces. He did not spare; they were no longer fit for the uses for which they were first intended, but became *vessels of wrath*, II. xxx. 14. fitted for destruction after a most astonishing manner, being rejected, broken, and dispersed over the face of the whole earth. If therefore this people fell away, and suffered their knowledge of God, his dispensations and promises to *slip from them*, Heb. ii. 1. (in the Apostle's phrase) as leaky vessels, where is the unrighteousness of God's turning his hand again to the lump, out of which they had been taken, and

and together with such among them as believed (as the prophet Jeremiah expresseth it) *making it up again another vessel*, working it up into a more perfect system of Christianity, into one fellowship of the Gospel?

Nor was the caution in the text intended solely for the Jews, but for all succeeding ages, to prevent an evil, which the folly and corruption of man (as at first) would continue to lead him into, of imputing unrighteousness to God. *Nay but, O Man, who art thou, that after the fashion of thy father Adam, repliest against God: Beware that thou fall not into the same transgression: Hath not the potter power over the clay, and so on?* He who made this system and man, must not he best know, what means and instruments will be most conducive to his ends and purposes? Must not he foresee, because we cannot, what each man will do, and how he will behave? And is this at all inconsistent with free-will in man? May not he make the evil of some minister to the good of others, and is not this evil the effect of their own misconduct? Did not God foresee that Esau would sell his birthright? The apostle seems to say as much

in what goes before touching the children of Rebecca by their father Isaac at the 11th verse; *For the children*, said he, *being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, it was said unto her, the elder should serve the younger, as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.* Did not he foresee, that Pharaoh would do, as he is expressly said to have done, *harden his own heart?* which God is likewise said to have hardened, and which in effect he did by withdrawing that grace more and more from him, which he had so obstinately resisted against the most open warning and the clearest evidence. This foresight in the deity is manifest from what goes before at the 17th verse, for the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, *even for this purpose have I raised thee up* (that is, not made him wicked, but called him forth, appointed, stationed him, set him up as a mark, made use of him for his gracious purposes towards the rest of mankind) *that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.* For as the Apostle observes in the foregoing verse, *it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy;* so we may say in the present instance, it is
not

not altogether of him that sinneth, but of God, that maketh use of the sinner for the purposes of good to others. And in this light we must consider that deduction of the Apostle in the next verse, that *God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth*, not by any actual, immediate impression, but by permitting him in punishment to go on in his own way without check or restraint from his grace, in which case obduracy must be the consequence. For (as he goes on) *What if God willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering, the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction* (and such was Pharaoh) *and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, whom he had afore prepared unto glory!* One thing is certain, and the Apostle confirms this assurance, that God hath not appointed us, that is, any man to wrath, but to obtain salvation by Jesus Christ. And it is said of the Jews, for whose sake chiefly this argument was intended, that the cause of their being rejected, and the Heathen taken into their room, was no arbitrary determination of God, but because they sought not righteousness by faith, but by the mere works of the law—Thus
far

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far with respect to the Jews and other Scripture instances.

SECONDLY, As to the difference between Christians and heathens, between ourselves and the barbarous nations of the earth, and which the good Christian finds it hard to reconcile with the justice and goodness of the Almighty, I shall endeavour to state that matter, as a farther illustration of the reasonableness of the expostulation in my text.

The mediator of the gospel-covenant hath given himself a ransom for all, and God did certainly accept his interposition in behalf of all mankind, having taken especial care from time to time, to make this acceptance known to all. But if the gracious purposes of God in this dispensation were not actually made known to every nation at the same time, yet no people upon earth, who shall sincerely endeavour, according to the best of their knowledge, to please God, will be excluded from the benefit of it. I say to the best of their knowledge, for what the Apostle speaks of the Gentiles *having not the law, and of their doing by nature the things contained in the law*, requires some explanation, in order to prevent or remove a mistake too prevalent with

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with Christians, who are not easily persuaded, but that the Heathens, whether antient or modern, were and are left to themselves without any light or revelation at all. And this explanation will serve to reconcile the proceedings of the deity more closely with his justice and his goodness. For,

FIRST, By the law may be understood revelation in general, whether that given to the Patriarchs, to Moses, or to mankind by Christ.

SECONDLY, By their not having the law is intended their not having any outward written law. And,

THIRDLY, By their doing by nature so and so, is meant their making a right use of such remains of light and instruction, as they could naturally have, such as was handed down to them from their forefathers by example, tradition, custom and the like, which last we are apt in common discourse to say is a second nature. In short, such as the times and state of things, wherein they were born, would afford. For as to their being left altogether to their own reason and the light of nature, let it be remembered, that reason which hath been so much idolized in wrong of revelation, is no other than a power or faculty in the mind of comparing and judging

ing upon evidence, when that evidence comes to be laid before us. Like the natural eye it is in itself dark without the assistance of light from above: It is not from within ourselves. And it is a misapprehension to suppose that the heathens had nothing of this nature given them, Christianity or the covenant of a redeemer subsisted from the beginning; was the purpose of God before the world, and was revealed to man immediately upon the fall. The Gentiles (take notice) were alike descendants of Adam, and once had all the same belief, the same hope, the same services, and the same moral obligations, but fell away and were dispersed far and wide. Time and abuses and other causes have been gradually impairing these traces; but still there are traces and manifest footsteps of the original revelation to be found amongst them even at this time o'day. So that they were not left altogether to themselves in a mere state of nature; nay their very human sacrifices are the remains, the corrupted remains, of an early notion and belief, which their forefathers entertained, that the deity was to be appeased by some great sacrifice; and had we time or liberty to set before you a general, much more a particular

particular display of the rites, traditions, customs and the like, in use at this day among the most barbarous and remote nations of the world, there would appear such evident traces of the old Patriarchal and Mosaic institutions, belief, and morality, and at the same time so close a resemblance and affinity between them, or many of them, as practiced by people placed at quite opposite points of the globe, that the very first glance of an eye must convince any reasonable man that they had all one common fountain, and are the broken remains of the same original revelation.

Then as to Christianity itself, or the very appearance of Christ and his doctrine, it is evident from the concurrent testimony both of Protestants and Papists, and sundry other writers, that there are sensible tokens in most parts of the world, of the Christian religion having been preached to them, and tho' it were not actually made known unto every nation at the same instant, it hath at one time or other visited most parts of the globe, that the isles have received the law, and even *Ethiopia*, as it was foretold, did *stretch out her hands unto God*. And if from want of care and the growth of corruption and wickedness, this
light,

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light, which was in them, is become in great measure dark, wo be to those, thro' whose default this hath happened ! Nevertheless those among them, who take care to cultivate the slender, the very slender remains of religion and morality, and make the best use of that which was all they could by nature or naturally have, all that the time and state of things, wherein they were born, would afford them, will be admitted to the benefits of his mediation, who *gave himself a ransom for all.*

And indeed it hath been often remarked, that the poor Indian, while unperverted by the arts of our Popish neighbours and their subtle emissaries, hath more good faith, natural truth and honesty, than his masters, or than some, perhaps, among ourselves, who boast a clearer light, and look upon themselves as vessels unto honour. And here give me leave to interpose one observation, namely, that trade to foreign lands was never designed by Providence to gratify pride, avarice, or ambition ; but to open a wider door for the propagation of Christianity. The various products of the earth lie wide of each other, which, together with the fancies and wanton appetites of the rich, the luxurious and the
vain,

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vain, were intended to promote the same good end. Trade indeed was designed to open the door, but well if it doth not, for private and selfish ends, industriously shut it up.

These wretched people were in their day, most of them at least, vessels to honour, when we ourselves sat in darkness. Now we are chosen vessels, and are admitted to their forfeiture, but with greater obligations upon us. In the mean time, as those who have no better light to walk by, are less blameworthy, if they mistake their way and wander from it, nor can their conscience in this case condemn them; so on the other hand, if acting according to what they have, is to be the rule and measure of their trial, their condemnation and acceptance, and nothing be expected from them, which they have not, they can in justice claim no more, nor say to their Creator, *Why hast thou made me thus?*

Besides, as God can and doth foresee by his Almighty power, what every people or individual will or will not do, it may, for ought we know, be a mercy to those poor souls, that they are hereby precluded from

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from the danger and the guilt of neglecting and abusing such advantages, as their fathers did before them. And well had it been perhaps for too many among ourselves, if we had been even as they : Nay, better had it been (as the Apostle tells us) never to have known the way of righteousness, than after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to us.

Thus have I set before you, **FIRST**, The fitness and propriety of the image here used, and, **SECONDLY**, the drift of the apostle, in the passage before us, or the justice and mercy of God in making one nation a vessel to honour and another unto dishonour. Let us apply the same,

THIRDLY and **LASTLY**, to the many seeming inequalities of Providence in private life, or the various states and conditions of men in it.

S E R M O N

S E R M O N XVIII.

ROM. ix. 20, 1.

Nay but O man, &c.

HAVING in a former discourse set before you,

FIRST, The fitness and propriety of the image in my text, and

SECONDLY, The drift of the apostle in the passage before us, or the justice and mercy of God in rendering one nation a vessel to honour, and another unto dishonour, I proceed in the

THIRD and LAST place to apply the same to the many seeming inequalities of Providence
in .

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in private life, or the various states and conditions of men in it. Whether they respect,

FIRST, Situations,

SECONDLY, Capacities,

THIRDLY, Constitutions,

FOURTHLY, Complexions,

FIFTHLY, Circumstances. Upon each of these I shall be very brief. And,

FIRST, Situations.

Much, indeed, of that uneasiness, repining and discontent, which we see in the world, would be prevented, were due care taken, to look into the genius and disposition of youth, and to set them forward in that way of life, to which nature points of her own accord, as she does very remarkably in some instances, and, if carefully attended to, pretty evidently in all: if we would do that for good and laudable ends, which a society of no little name among our Popish neighbours have address and policy enough to do for purposes not altogether so righteous and praise-worthy, being *wiser*, however, *in their generation than those who boast themselves Children of Light*. For in the mind of every man as coming forth of the hands of his maker, there is a
natural

S E R M O N XVIII. 319

natural fitness and propensity to this or that situation, study, or profession, this or that trade, manufacture, and occupation, that is not easily suppress'd, and when misapplied, is for ever shewing itself, and reproaching such misapplication. But where the capacity and its object are happily met together, there must be a readiness and a relish attending the performance, and we all know, that what is done with ease and inclination, is most likely to be continued with spirit and perseverance. And if this method were pursued, as it ought to be, there would be much more contentment, fewer interferences with each other, and envyings of our neighbour's situation. So that our Almighty Former hath graciously done his part: Nevertheless upon any failure or uneasiness ensuing from a want of care in this particular, the charge is too often brought against Providence. But what or wheresoever our lot may chance to be, if it be not the special direction of Providence, is however by his permission; which is a tacit obligation upon us to be content therewith. In truth, as man came forth from the dust, and is to return thither, to one, who thinks and makes a due use of his reason, it must be of little
real

real concern what form he wears, or what station is assigned him, so long as he continues in it, and acquits himself of his duty in the best manner he can, keeping himself pure and in a readiness for the master's use. —Another difference or distinction among men, is,

SECONDLY, Their capacities, in respect of which few are heard to complain, the generality of mankind being severally as little disposed to question the sufficiency of their own understandings, as to admit of its being questioned by others. But a difference there manifestly is and must be, there are in this respect likewise *vessels to honour, and some to dishonour*, a disparity of genius being necessary to society, and the sundry occasions of life. But whether this diversity be the immediate act of God upon our frame, or the effect of some hereditary constitutional impression, or be owing to some outward accident, there is however very little room either for boasting or complaint. It is fool in the moral sense that causeth shame.

As to what our Saviour saith in St. Matth. v. *whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell-fire*; the characteristic, *thou fool*, in this place is to be taken in the
same

same light with him who *said in his heart, there is no God*, and signifies idolater, blasphemer, and the like: an accusation of the most dangerous nature and tendency, and by consequence the more criminal, and liable to the severest punishment.

It is a fool, I say, in a moral sense, that causeth shame: And as to persons of plain sense and moderate capacity, such are found upon experience to go thro' life much more smoothly, and to be exempted from those vices, into which men of brighter parts are too apt to be carried, and from those troubles and disquietudes, which are ever more exquisitely felt in proportion to mens delicacy and quickness of understanding and sentiment. The potter may widen or contract the vessel under his hand, as he shall think fit, but it is in substance the same: Or, should it from want of care in parents, or through some unavoidable accident be marred, and so become weak and unprofitable, yet this reacheth not to the spirit, or its eternal interests. In truth, a great wicked man may come to wish he had been born an idiot, and where we see a man abusing his understanding, *there is more hope of a fool than of him.*

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The THIRD particular wherein men differ one from another, is their make and constitution. Nor hath any man a right upon this article, to say to him that formed him, why hast thou made me thus? For sin is originally and actually the cause of sickness and death, and every infirmity or irregularity in our frame may be the necessary, though perhaps the secret, effect of our own or our parents indiscretion, but is nevertheless intended for our good.

Constitution, whether it be sound or weak, is a talent, which may be applied to many good and valuable purposes : but my business is chiefly with the latter, which, though attended with some infelicities, is not without its privileges and blessings, and affords room for the exercise of many virtues, such as patience and submission to the will of God, to which they become inured by degrees. For our Maker is as much glorified by patience and submission, as by virtues of a more active sort. From these however we must separate those, who make even sickness minister to vanity: who place a kind of pomp in the character of invalid; or from a mere spirit of idleness, or some secret and selfish design, affect to be continually indispos'd, or
improve

improve a slight complaint into an habitual and serious illness.

Farther; An infirm constitution of body is often made up by a superior genius, quickness of parts, and steddiness of spirits, in the latter of which they are for the most part peculiarly happy, from their having learnt in this lower instance that lesson which our Saviour gave his disciples (Luke xxi. 9.) *of possessing their souls in patience.* Such moreover from their being so much less within the world and its influence, are more out of the way of temptation, have fewer demands upon them from passion and appetite; the necessary restraints they are under, are adapted to secure them from many evils, which others are liable to. Such have more leisure and more frequent incitements to converse with God, and less of that confidence in their own strength and the things of this world, which a course of high health is apt to create, and which is often taken short; and by consequence in less danger of being surprised by death, and have reason to bless the Almighty for giving them ample time and notice for a due preparation, having in the mean while a more grateful and lively relish of those blessed intervals of ease, which are

every now and then returning, and are superior to almost every other enjoyment this world can afford.

Nor does the good arising from these instances of bodily weakness terminate in themselves. It extends moreover to others. It becomes a daily monitor against confiding too much in the things of this life, is a call to temperance, consideration, and thanksgiving; an opportunity for the exercise of natural affection, brotherly kindness, and the prevailing spirit of charity; an additional tie of endearment between parents and children, husband and wife, brethren and neighbours, high and low, rich and poor; so that through the weakness of some the whole is made strong. To this difference of constitution may be added,

FOURTHLY, The various complexions of men; by which I mean that peculiar cast of body or mind, by which one man is distinguished and differently affected in himself or in conversation from his neighbour: whether he be of a phlegmatic or sprightly turn, bold or modest, steady or timorous, of a conciliating aspect, air, and manner, and upon that score sure to find favour in the eyes of the world, or labouring under contrary infirmities
and

and embarrassments, and apt to envy those to whom nature has been more indulgent, and opened a readier way to success, and of course think themselves hardly treated by their Maker, as children discountenanced and kept under, and to say in their hearts, *why hast thou made me thus?* But if all were alike bold, the whole would be running to arms, and none would be left for private and domestic services. If the bulk were alike gentle and meek spirited, the land would want defenders. If beauty were the common stamp, and all had equal advantages of person, the world would be wholly taken up in contemplating themselves and each other; the graces and beauties of the mind would be neglected, and the more valuable purposes of life ill served or altogether disregarded. For where an undue measure of attention is turned to dress and outward ornament, then, and in the same proportion, will the understanding be left bare and uncultivated.

Again: A man of a gloomy or reserved cast may be excluded the society of the jovial and airy, or be uneasy in it. The bashful may be overborn by the noisy, the froward and impertinent, and some unpleasing circumstances may attend a bodily defect or disadvantage;

advantage; nevertheless it is no small recompence that the one is hereby removed out of the way of intemperance, riot and prophane-ness; the other of licentiousness and presumption, while the latter are secured from vanity, self-conceit, dissipation and debauchery. It is true likewise, that the world is not apt to make a sufficient allowance for an unhappy temper, which, so far as it is complexional, is involuntary, and, together with the rest abovementioned, may be the effect of some hereditary corruption, of want of care in parents or others, and the like. But though these things do not come to pass by any immediate impression from Providence, they are nevertheless (as I remarked above) by its permission; and therefore a proper behaviour under those disadvantages cannot fail of being acceptable in the sight of God, and procuring for us the rewards of an effectual, though involuntary course of self-denial and mortification. Such may do as St. Paul did, *glory in their infirmities*, being equally, if not in a superior measure, objects of the divine favour and regard, who hath often imparted very distinguished abilities to such unpromising instruments, and who *chose the weak things of the world, and things which are despised, to confound the things that*

are

are mighty. For even our great apostle (St. Paul) we find had little natural or personal accomplishments to aid his mission; for in his second epistle to the Corinthians (xi. 6.) he confesseth himself to be naturally *rude in speech*, and speaking of himself in another place, (1 Cor. xi. 3, 4.) *I was with you (saith he) in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, &c.* and introduceth his opposers as slighting his bodily appearance, (2 Cor. x. 6.) *his letters (say they) are weighty and powerful, but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible:* and then declares his sentiments of some amongst them, who looking on things after the outward appearance, *measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves amongst themselves were not wise. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.* In short, when all particulars are fully and fairly laid together and considered, there will be found no room for complaint, or to say to him that formed us, *why hast thou made me thus?* But there is one particular yet behind, viz.

FIFTHLY, Circumstances. Now this difference of condition yields a never ceasing fund
of

of complaint, and occasions a mighty fermentation among the lower tribes. God, it is said, *maketh poor and maketh rich*, but this is for the most part to be understood in a spiritual sense, and with respect to the knowledge and blessings of the Gospel. He doth the same however as to temporals in many particular instances, as in the case of Job, &c. but a great part of what we see in the world is the result of vice and knavery on the one part, and of folly and weakness on the other, which the goodness and wisdom of the Almighty, who looketh through all things, is pleased to conduct to the good of the whole: Among other instances, by making the inconstancy of earthly possessions a standing argument and admonition, that this is *no continuing city*, that these are not the true riches, that they are as our Saviour affirms in St. Luke (xvi. 12.) not ours, but others, i. e. are designed for the use of others,

It is moreover by the same course of Providence that the good and evil things (as they are called) come to be more equally divided, nor either of them permitted to stand for a continuance with the same generation. At the same time inequality is as necessary in life, as in the face of the creation. If all

had

had wealth, there would be none to labour; were there no poor, there would be no room for the exercise of charity. Where more is committed, there will be more expected and greater temptations. If our commission be less, the less will be expected with fewer temptations; for a life of industry is a constant security against them. The rich have their good things, and whatever may be thought or pretended, many evil ones. If the poor have their evil things, they are not destitute of good ones. A high station is exposed to many disquietudes, that are never heard in the vale. Health and spirits seem to have deserted the wealthier part of mankind, and settled among the labouring sort; and should a wish chance to stray beyond the humble bounds of their present condition, yet no one of them can be sure he shall be a whit the better or happier by the remove. In truth, men in all times, places, and circumstances have been so backward to believe this, that history, morality, fable, and every art of invention has been applied to set this matter in its true light, and to convince men, that if they could look into the breasts of others, and foresee as God doth, they would soon perceive the weakness of that expositu-

lation

lation with their maker, *Why hast thou made me thus?*

Thus have I dismiss'd what I undertook, viz.

FIRST, To assert the fitness and propriety of the image here used.

SECONDLY, To shew the drift of the Apostle in this chapter, and the justice of God in his dealings both with Jew and Gentile, and

THIRDLY and LASTLY, To app'y the same to many seeming inequalities of Providence in common life.

I shall now close up all with a short reflection of two,

FIRST, From the first part of this discourse, I infer, that in the passage before us there is no foundation for the idle notion of predestination, which, as it is commonly understood, signifies God's predestinating, or arbitrarily determining some to be eternally happy, and others eternally miserable, which is a doctrine, of all others, the most injurious to the honour of God.

As to what the Apostle saith, at the 11th verse of this chapter, of the *purpose of God according to election*, it doth by no means respect

respecting their election to eternal life, but merely his electing or preferring the seed of the one before the other, to be accounted by him as the seed of Abraham. This is all the argument requires, and all that these instances were brought to prove. Then as to that passage in the first to Ephesians (5th and 11th verses) where we read, *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself:* it means neither more nor less than this: God did predestinate, predetermine, or purpose beforehand, that salvation should be the portion of believers, and condemnation of unbelievers, whether Jew or Gentile. If therefore the Jews in general did not believe, they according to such purpose, fore-appointment or predestination, were condemned. If the Gentiles came into the faith, which the other rejected, they, as it was purposed or predestinated, were adopted in their room, *according to the good pleasure of his will*, as the Apostle expresseth it at the 5th verse, that is, according to the plan or purpose, which God freely, and of his own good pleasure, had laid down to himself, as
a gracious

a gracious means and opportunity given to man for the recovery of what he had lost. This is all that can or ought to be collected from it. Then as to my

LAST head, touching the many seeming inequalities of Providence in common life, what is the use and end of all this, but to beget in you a firm persuasion, that Divine Providence is kind to man as much or more, in what he denies, than in what he bestows upon us; that a present seeming evil may be intended to produce or promote some future actual good, and our not being what we wish, to prevent our becoming what we would not wish? That, what, or wheresoever our station may be, it is our duty to be contented and thankful, and to keep our vessels pure, and in readiness for the master's use; to remember that we were as vessels marr'd, and wherein was no pleasure, but are built up again in Christ; and to trust in his goodness and mercy, who *knoweth whereof we are made, and remembereth that we are but dust?*

S E R M O N XIX.

LUKE xi. 35.

*Take heed that the light, that is in thee, be
not darkness.*

AMONG the various and apt similitudes which the holy Spirit makes use of to illustrate and enforce its divine truths, the comparison between the light of the body, the eye, and the light of the soul, in this chapter challengeth no little share of our praise and admiration.

The light of the body (saith our Saviour) is the eye, therefore when thine eye is single, i. e. free from any spot, blemish, or dimness of any kind, thy whole body also shall be full of light; but when thine eye is evil, vitiated, over-
cast

cast or clouded by any film or peccant humour, *thy whole body is full of darkness.*

That either of these may be the case, more or less, is implied in the verse immediately after my text, where we read, *if thy whole body be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light*, which shews, that it may be wholly dark, or in part only; and as blemishes of this sort are apt to spread, that there is the more need of timely care to prevent the same. *Take heed that the light which is in thee, be not darkness.*

Farther, by a single eye may be intended likewise the keeping it in a constant direction towards its proper object, i. e. not suffering it to glance aside, or hanker after other things which do not belong to it, or are improper for it. Both will comport with the design of our Saviour in the passage before us, which from a parallel place in St. Matthew vi. 22. seems to be directed more immediately against covetousness or worldly mindedness, which St. John in one of his epistles (1 Ep. ii. 16.) calls *the lust of the eyes*. But neither were these words pointed solely against covetousness, but against envy, pride, lust, intemperance, and other vices, which are severally distinguished in scripture as an evil eye.

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Some indeed will have it, that by a single eye may be implied likewise purity of intention, or its reverse, in their several degrees. And so indeed they may in some instances, but not solely or principally. But of whatever kind this spot, cloud or blemish above hinted at may be, which tends to impair the light that is in us, it is my design, in the

FIRST place, To apply this doctrine to a few particulars both of nature and grace, and

SECONDLY, To make one general use of what shall have been said. And,

FIRST, &c. *What communion* (saith the apostle, 2 Cor. vi. 14.) *hath light with darkness?* why, just as much as two things can be supposed to have, which are in continual war with each other. For it is in the moral, as it is in the natural world, there is a continual struggle between light and darkness, which shall get the better, each endeavouring to bring the other over to its own likeness. This is discernible upon the face of every morning and evening, and in other inferior instances. We read in the verse before my text, that *if there be no part dark, our whole body shall be full of light, as when the bright*
shining

shining of a candle giveth us light; which, when lighted up, in a moment scatters and dispels the surrounding shades, or rather transforms them into its own likeness. And yet it may happen that a thick air, an hovering mist or vapour shall overrule and obscure the brightness of such taper or candle in different degrees, and at last perhaps totally extinguish the same.

The comparison is just: For as the brightness of the one is an admirable image of a clear mind or conscience, and an improved understanding and judgment: So the latter is a very apt representation of the advances and encroachments, which our lusts and sins are continually making upon them all.

Every mind or understanding indeed, like every eye, is not equally strong and clear; nevertheless if it be kept free, duly exercised and improved, it will serve to the purposes for which it was given us. An involuntary darkness or defect in either is a pitiable misfortune and there can lie no blame against it. But how seldom is that the case in respect to the bulk of mankind, who have light enough both from within and from without, if they please to make use of it? Nay these powers of sight both of body and mind have, it is certain,

certain, been extended by use and application to a surprising degree of sharpness and penetration, and may doubtless be carried farther than experiment hath hitherto gone: And farther, there is a peculiar alliance and consent between those two, between the light of the body, the eye, and the light of the soul. For though the soul will be shewing itself by the action and expression of other parts of the body, it most certainly speaks in the eyes, and the more forcibly in proportion to the clearness of the one, and the activity of the other.

That there is a sufficient measure of light, or capacity for discernment in the mind, when its proper object comes before it, is evident from that exhortation of our Saviour in St. Luke xii. 57. *yea, and why even of your own selves judge ye not what is right?* But there is a peculiar clearness of mind attending our earlier days, while it is yet in no part dark, ere prepossessions of any evil sort have taken place, ere the mists of error, prejudice and passion have begun to obscure it; much more, if assisted by a right education. But in truth, it rarely continueth for any time in its first purity. There is a corrupt nature within that is continually sending up those

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impure vapours, evil thoughts and desires, which are enemies to it. But though its purity may be occasionally impaired by such vapours, yet the offence may soon be removed, and its clearness renewed and restored, if we take it in time, and we may come again to conceive and judge of ourselves and of things about us as we used to do, applauding what is right, and hating what is wrong. But if these effects of a corrupt nature become frequent and lasting, if they be suffer'd to come on in continuation, if a vice and its prejudices (for most prejudices are founded in vice) whether that vice be covetousness, pride, envy, malice or the like, be indulged, the evil arising from it will in time continue to adhere, to spread, and to darken by degrees the whole man; so that he can no longer see as he used to do, no longer judge of his own or other mens actions, as he was wont, or perceive the beauty or deformity of any thing about him. Whereas, in order to judge righteously and faithfully of any action or pursuit, we must have a comprehensive view of the intention, the motives, and all the other circumstances preceding or following that action or pursuit; and so long as we pay an equal or proportionate attention to them all,

all, no one will be able to draw us aside from knowing and judging what is right. But if that equality be broken in upon by the predominance of any one, by the sense (suppose) of pleasure, or profit, resulting from this or that particular, this or that particular will in time engage our whole care, and we shall soon be blind to every other consideration. I shall instance what I have been saying in three particulars out of many others that might be produced, namely, covetousness, envy and lust. And,

FIRST, I shall instance in that, which seems to have given occasion to this caution of our blessed Lord, namely, covetousness, or what is called worldly-mindedness, which is distinguished by the wise man as an *evil eye*, Prov. xxviii. 22. The covetous man, so long as his eye continued single, i. e. unperturbed, uncorrupted, sought the good things of this life upon these rational and and laudable principles, viz. that he might provide for himself and his household, *that he might have to give to him that needeth*, that he might honour the Lord with his substance, and that he might serve the Lord without distraction. And thus far all was well. He went on in singleness of heart,

and allowed every consideration its due weight. But as his goods encrease, he perceives a new pleasure accruing to him from that increase, and compliments himself upon the works (for such he hath learn'd to call them) of his own hands. That pleasure begins to weigh down all other considerations, it draws his eye off by degrees from every thing else, his sight becometh so contracted, and his heart so pursed up, that he will neither see nor hear of any thing, that may happen to interfere with it. He was once open-hearted himself, and could praise the same good quality in others. But now, if his neighbour exercise a prudent hospitality, he is sure to give it an ill turn, and to condemn it, as profuseness, being no longer able to discern the generous and commendable principles, upon which it proceeds; and the same will he judge of every other virtue of a liberal and charitable mind; and from the same cause he becomes stark blind to the deformities of his own conduct in that and many other particulars. So again, if any thing shall tend to advance his avaritious purposes, though it be wrong, he doth not perceive wherein it is so, but concludes it to be right, merely because it ministers to his favourite passion.

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But (what is most to my present purpose) when this passion first took place, it was hardly to be perceived even by the party himself. From whence we may learn, that when once the evil is introduced, if it be not narrowly watched and withstood, it will soon make its own quarters good, and oblige every better quality to retire and give place to it. A speck or blemish, when it is just entring upon the ball of the eye, shall be extremely small and hardly discernible, and by care and proper applications may be done away or kept from spreading; otherwise what is dark in part only now, will shortly become such altogether. It is pretty much in this light, that we are to understand that command of God, which we read in the book of Deuteronomy, xvi. 19. *thou shalt not wrest judgment, thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift, for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise*, i. e. let them be ever so knowing, or their discernment ever so great, they will yet be so intent both upon the gift and the giver, that they will see but on one side, their minds will be in part dark, and will upon that score be tempted to wrest judgment and to have respect to persons, which, while their eye was single and unperversed, there was no danger

danger of their doing. It is much the same,

SECONDLY, With the envious man, who is spoken of both by sacred and prophane writers, as one of an evil eye. Before that eye was in any part dark, before that unhappy quality had begun to obscure it, he was so far a christian as to love doing good, and to behold it done by others; could discern the wisdom of the Almighty in the various distribution of things in this life, could perceive that inequality of station and condition in the world to be as necessary and as beautiful, as that of hill and valley upon the face of this earth; was humble enough not to think his own condition impaired, or his own merit impeached by the success or exaltation of other men, and so on. But when pride and an immoderate self-love had begun to change and discolour the temper and serenity of his mind, and to breed uneasiness, jealousy and discontent, when his eye was no longer single, or satisfied with the good, which Providence had wisely and graciously assigned him, but was for ever glancing aside with an invidious dissatisfaction at his neighbour's prosperity, this growing defect, this *mote* (to use our Saviour's phrase) *in his eye* did soon become a
beam,

beam, (Matth. vii. 3.) and must ever prove a greater torment in the end, than any tyrant of old ever invented. Again;

THIRDLY, This light of the body, this single eye is more immediately applicable to that chastity of heart and life, which is the distinguishing grace and excellency of every age, but particularly of our younger years. Chastity is of a celestial nature; we are then, i. e. before *evil communications have corrupted our manners*, in some degree, what we shall be in the resurrection of the just, when our corruptions being done away, we shall be like unto angels.

It is the Apostle's just remark, that as the *flesh lusteth* or contends for the mastery *against the spirit*, so doth *the spirit against the flesh*, Gal. v. 17. each endeavouring, like light and darkness, to bring over the other to its own likeness. Thus modesty and natural ingenuousness is much offended with any attempt to break in upon it, it strives much and is much distress'd. But when bad books and impure conversation have tarnished that purity of mind, and made that eye, which once was single, dim, or dark in some degree, the evil will spread very fast, one degree

gree of blindness and corruption will succeed to another, till the whole man be full of darkness.

How many have lamented their want of care in this particular! "O how sweet is the remembrance of our young, our chaste and innocent days!" is the secret sigh of all those, whose minds and consciences, tho' hurt by offences of this kind, are not given up an absolute prey to the flesh and its lusts. The same observations will extend themselves in the

SECOND PLACE, To the operations of grace likewise, that heavenly light, which is within us all, severally indeed, as it hath pleased God, and which enlighteneth the soul, as the natural light from above, to which it is compared, doth the eye. Thus the Apostle speaks *of the eyes of our understanding being enlightened*; with many other phrases of the same nature. And this light, while it is preserved pure and undiminished, will shew us things that are excellent, and lead us to approve the same. It will also discover what is otherwise; for (as the Apostle speaks) *All things that are reprov'd (or convicted of evil) are made manifest by this light*, so that we shall discern the good or
evil

evil of what we do ourselves, and of what we see done by others. And thus it continueth for some time, till a series of bad actions, or an obstinate perseverance in any one bring a cloud over it, and prevent or restrain its freedom of operation. This holy spirit doth not indeed submit very soon or easily to what opposeth it; we are told, and we may find, that it strives, that it resists, as well as is resisted; and gladly embraces every opening to renew its blessed influence with us. And as God is righteous in all his dispensations, what I, what another, what numbers have perceived in ourselves, it is not to be doubted but all have in some degree experienced. Who is there, with whom this light hath not shined in their hearts? Whose eyes have not been enlightened by it? Is there any among us, who can say, but that he hath in proportion to the measure of his improvement in Christian knowledge sensibly felt at different seasons the force and charms of religion and a good life, been delighted with the wonders of creation and providence, hath *tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come*, being struck with the terrors of an offended God, the dread of eternal punishment, and for that space of
time

time clearly discerned the folly, the baseness, the madness of his sins? Have not the thoughts of that happy time, *when God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes, when there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain*:—Have not the joys of Heaven, those high communications we shall one day have with the illustrious dead, with saints and angels, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Moses and the prophets, with Christ in his human nature, yea, with God himself—Have not *those rivers of pleasure at God's right hand*, that celestial Paradise, whose foundations are faintly illustrated by *pure gold and all manner of precious stones*, whose light is clear as chrystal, which hath no need of the sun, neither the moon to shine upon it;—Have not these and other divine truths, far beyond the powers of language to represent or express, wrought upon us for a time to change our course of living and acting, and have we not in the strength of it bound ourselves in the most solemn and serious manner so to do?

That this light hath been with us and in us at some seasons, that our eye hath been single and able to discern our true interests, and in virtue thereof we have become occasionally

tionally good Christians for a while, is not to be denied. But we suffer these impressions to give way by degrees to the cares and pleasures of this life, which did religion preserve its stated hours, had our bibles and our prayer-books more of our time and attention, they would not do. And if the ordinary affairs of the world produce so unhappy an effect, what must a life of dissipation, such as the generality among us lead from day to day, from year to year, beget in the end! The same, doubtless, which (the Apostle saith) beset those of whom he is speaking, *their foolish heart* will become, not in part only, but totally *darkened*.

And now, what is the result of all this? but that, in the

LAST place, we guard with the utmost vigilance against the very first approaches of any evil principle, that shall attempt to impair the light that is in us, to blind our eyes, and to pervert our judgments. Covetousness, you see, introduceth a narrowness of soul, and mars all that fair prospect, which an early humanity and goodness of heart had proposed to itself, and was delighted with. Envy (we find) stands in direct opposition
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to this single eye. Injustice will let us see nothing, that truth hath to offer on the part of our adversary. The passions of anger and revenge so far dim our sight as to prevent more and more our perceiving the consequences of what we do, whether they affect others or even ourselves. But its worst enemy is lust and uncleanness. Not even the natural light, that is in us, much less can that of grace subsist amidst the pollutions of the flesh.

The light of the Holy Spirit, when extinguished, cannot be restored. It doth not, however, forsake us till the very last; nay, if the clouds that obscure it at present, be done away by a course of self-denial and mortification, it may in some measure be renewed, but never to its original purity, notwithstanding the high things that are spoken in favour of repentance.

Let then the younger part of my audience learn this useful lesson from hence, to set a just value upon that dear time of ingenuousness and singleness of heart, which they now enjoy; that purity of mind and judgment; that brightness and serenity of soul,

soul, which is the complexion of their early and more innocent years. Let them preserve this light in their vessels so necessary to cheer and conduct them to the end of their days. Let them keep it from being spotted in any degree by the flesh and its lusts. Let them flee intemperance and concupiscence, as its worst enemies. Let them enter upon the world with the utmost diffidence and caution, as upon a dangerous coast. Let them be most jealous of conversation, when it pleases most: Let them taste the pleasures and amusements of life, more especially such as are theatrical, with a very sparing hand. Let them consider what they have at stake, and what they are putting to the hazard: for corruption steals in unobserved. It may be compared to what the servant, whom Elijah sent to the top of Mount Carmel, reported to his master: When first he went, there was nothing; but upon his going again and again, there was a *little cloud about the bigness of a man's hand*, 2 Kings xviii. 43, and in a short time the heavens were darkened and overspread with clouds.

To conclude: Great wisdom, as well as great folly is seen in little things, and the
truth

350 S E R M O N XIX.

truth of the observation made by the wise son of Sirach hath been sufficiently proved in all times, viz. He, *that contemneth or neglecteth small things, shall fall by little and little.* Ecclef. xix. 1.

SERMON

S E R M O N XX.

GAL. iv. 4. former part.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his son.

THE Advent of Christ, or the fulness of time, when God sent forth his son, being that which our church commemorates at this season, suggested these words as a proper subject for our meditations. By the fulness of time we must understand that period which for many wise reasons was fixed upon by divine wisdom for the appearance of the Messiah, and which plainly bespeaks the necessity of his not appearing before. Indeed, among other questions that have been asked by

by way of difficulty or objection to the Christian religion, this hath been commonly one, namely, if the coming of Christ into the world, to save sinners, were so highly necessary or expedient, why (say they) did he not appear in it sooner, or why just then when he did? But before I speak to this point, it may be proper to observe, that the sacrifice or expiation which our redeemer made for the sins of the world, was the chief occasion of his being sent into it. And as this expiation or sacrifice was to be made but once; since (as the Apostle observes) *Christ was not often to suffer from the foundation of the world*, Heb. ix. 26. since he was to *appear but once to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, it mattered not much, as to this particular purpose, at what period of time he should do so, provided that all mankind, whether they lived before him, with him, or after him, should be capable of reaping the benefits of it. And since the time of his appearance was, in this respect, a thing indifferent, since that atonement for sin, which was the happy effect of it, was not confined to the few years of his abiding here upon earth, but was to extend itself thro' every age from the fall to this present moment, there is no necessity

neceffity for our giving any reason, why he came into the world at the time he did, rather than any other. So long as there is no injury done, there is no room for complaint, and so long as we have received, or may receive the benefit, what remains but to be thankful? It is enough that he vouchsafed to come at all, and were we to make no other reply, this alone would be a sufficient answer to the question before us. But I mean not to rest the matter there, but shall point out some of the more particular reasons, which were probably the motives of our Saviour's coming into the world at the time he did. And

FIRST, Where would our objectors place it more properly? Would they have it soon after the fall? As it would then have been removed at a greater distance from the bulk of mankind, as it could have been attested but by few witnesses; as those few, considering the unimproved state of the world, which was then in its infancy, were not in a condition to attend wholly to the business of religion, or had not sufficient leisure for that purpose.—As the only manner, wherein they could have delivered down the truths of Christianity, (letters and the art of writing being then unknown) must have been mere

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tradition,

tradition, would not many more objections have been raised against it, had such been the method of its conveyance to the rest of mankind? But besides, the world appears to have made so little, or so ill an use of what had been revealed already and so lately too, prefiguring this great advent, that even while the memory of Adam's transgression, and of the Divine Covenant of Grace, was so fresh in their minds, yet they became so irreclaimably wicked, as not to be capable of receiving it, since they merited a deluge instead of a better and fuller revelation.

Again; **SECONDLY**, should this advent have taken place immediately after the deluge? Why, neither would that have been so proper a time, since the thin remainder of mankind must have been then in almost the same state as it was soon after the creation.

THIRDLY, Another, and a stronger motive for Christ's appearing at the time he did is, because one great proof of our Saviour's divine mission, and of the truth of his religion, was to be taken from the accomplishments of the prophecies concerning him.

Now

Now the greater distance of time there was from the prediction to the event, the stronger and more unexceptionable must the proofs be that were drawn from them. Men of art and penetration may come by experience to have some tolerable insight into the issues and consequences of things; into such future events as are at no great distance from them, or such as have any visible connection with the causes which commonly produce them: But to foresee facts many ages distant, and of a contingent nature, facts, which exceed the settled and ordinary powers of things, such as were the miracles which Christ wrought, and his own resurrection: This, I say, is the peculiar prerogative of God, whose infinite knowledge has a perfect view of every particle of time, and whose power can make things which are not, either to bring to nought, or to work together with things that are. This likewise gave room for a succession of prophets at different times as well as of different characters in point of genius, and way of writing, and who for that very reason could not be suspected of combining together to deceive the world. By this means also the expectations of the people of Israel, and others who had any in-

tercourse with them were continually awakened and kept up, and raised by so many gradual advances still higher and higher, till that fulness of time in which he appeared.

So that if the coming of our Saviour had not been deferred so long as it was, he could not have been spoken of by the prophets at so many *sundry times and in such divers manners*, as he now has been; without which he had not been so generally expected before he came, and one of the strongest proofs of his being the Messiah would have been wanting when he did come. But,

FOURTHLY, Another probable motive to Christ's coming into the world at the time he did, is this, that then and not till then, a sufficient trial had been made what human reason was able to do of itself without him. For the benefits and excellency of the gospel could not have approved themselves so fully, or have been so successful in drawing men to it, till the world had been convinced of the weakness and insufficiency of human reason: nor would the weakness and insufficiency of our mere natural powers, have so fully appeared, had they not been tried to the utmost, which could not well be but in

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due course of time. The space between the fall and the flood, and from the flood to the giving of the law, would not have been sufficient for that purpose. Now had the son of God been sent into the world, within either of these periods, there could not have been sufficient evidence that human reason was of itself too feeble to have recovered them out of the corrupt state into which they were fallen.

At a juncture so disadvantageous, no just trial could have been made, no proper measure could have been taken of its weakness or strength. Had it only been tried, when at its lowest ebb, we could not then have insisted, that it had been put upon a fair trial; or at least this could not have been asserted upon so good grounds as it is now. Such a dark period of time as the ages then were, would have been no more fit to have tried the powers of reason, than the minority or infancy of man's age would be to make an experiment of his natural strength.

Had our Saviour been sent into the world either long before or long after the days of Augustus Cæsar, as far as human discernment can judge, a great inconvenience would have

have ensued, for an earlier appearance (as has been already observed) would have left us no sufficient conviction, but that the world might have been reclaimed to the worship of the one true God by its own natural powers, without his assistance; since after so much experience of our own weakness, many can scarce even now be prevailed upon to acknowledge either the necessity or expediency of a divine revelation for teaching us what the will of the Lord is, and disposing us to observe it. On the other hand, a later appearance would not have found mankind in so suitable a condition for examining the credentials of our Saviour's mission, nor for enquiring into the truth and authority of his doctrines. Had it been delayed, for instance, for five hundred years longer, we know there was a relapse of mankind into a state of ignorance and blindness. And the charge of imposture would then have sounded more plausibly, when so few persons had been competent judges in the case, or had known how to distinguish a counterfeit pretence from a just and well grounded claim.

But now in this critical juncture, in the expected fulness of time, in which our Redeemer did appear, all circumstances were
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concurring to render it the very fittest season for that purpose. Human reason had then been tried in all the various shapes and parts of it, and was never perhaps wrought up to a greater or so great a degree of improvement and penetration, elegance and acuteness, as at that very time. Philosophy and the sciences were then more generally cultivated, and learning of almost all sorts more common than in any other age of the world. By which means the proofs of the christian religion were more narrowly and closely examined, and consequently more fairly and firmly established.

Now if human reason had then all the advantages, which it can, at any time, be expected to have, it would then have manifested its power in the reformation of mankind: but this was far from being the case. Both the Jewish and Gentile religions at the time of our Saviour's appearance in the world, stood greatly in need of a reformation.

Among the Jews, the life and spirit of true religion was overloaded with, and almost buried beneath outward forms and ceremonies. They had smarted so severely for their past licentiousness, that they thought they could
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never go far enough from that extreme, and therefore ran headlong into another, the most gross and senseless superstition. As indeed it most commonly happens; licentiousness being generally followed by bigotry, and bigotry by licentiousness. They had quite reversed the just order of religious duties, by preferring sacrifice to mercy, and a multitude of outward observances before the eternal laws of righteousness and truth.

The case of the Gentiles was still more deplorable. Whatever advances they made in other parts of knowledge contributed nothing to their improvements in religion. On the contrary every fresh discovery was so far from leading them up to the great Author of nature, that the discoverer became entitled to religious honours and addresses himself, and intercepted those marks of gratitude that were due to the Creator alone. Thus the true God was lost in a crowd of false ones, and his worship still more and more corrupted, as the vices of his rivals gave occasion for corrupting it still farther with improper mixtures. Never were the most impure superstitions at a greater height than when the Son of God was sent into the world to reclaim men from them. Never was the
worship

worship of the deity so disguised with superfluous rites, so misguided in its object, and so corrupt in every part of it, as when our Saviour came with this message from heaven, that *God was a spirit*, and would thenceforth be *worshipped in spirit and in truth*, John iv. 24. And surely it cannot be denied, that when the face of religion was so universally deformed, when it plainly appeared, that if left to itself, it was never likely to be otherwise, when the most promising helps for cleansing and refining it did rather encrease its deformity, and assist in spreading the foul contagion, then, if ever, was the proper season for the hand of heaven to interpose. And the benefit of such divine interposition was then undoubtedly greatest and most conspicuous, when the occasions for it were so too. And here the Devil defeated his own purposes; he was rejoicing upon his great success, and that he had now the greatest part of mankind at his devotion: but in this he was palpably deceived. His votaries grew tired and ashamed of the foulness and cruelty of his service, and therefore eagerly embraced the good tidings of a Saviour to deliver them from it. Farther,

FIFTHLY,

FIFTHLY, Our Saviour appeared at a time, when the propagation of the Gospel was more practicable, than it could have been, humanly speaking, at any other; and this probably was another reason for his coming at that precise period of time.

In the exercise of his Providence the Almighty hath not indeed tied himself down to human means or natural causes; but yet he does not use to break in upon them, so long as his purposes can be answered without it. No season therefore could be more fit for the appearance of a teacher sent from God, than that wherein his instructions might be most generally diffused, and most easily transmitted from one part of the world to another by natural means.

It was no inconsiderable step towards it, that the Almighty was pleased to scatter that obstinate people the Jews by successive captivities, mixing them from time to time with every people, whereby the curiosity of mankind was gradually raised to enquire into their laws, customs, prophecies and the other dispensations of Providence towards them, and who by that means became insensibly prepared for the reception of the Gospel, when it should
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be revealed in its due season. Nay, the present dispersion of that people in the yet unconverted parts of the world, may have been, and continue to be, instrumental in bringing them home to the christian fold, though we cannot discern the regular steps and advances of it.

But beside this dispersion of the Jews, the government under which our Saviour was born made it the most apt time for his appearance in the world. The Roman empire was in or near its height, when our Saviour came upon this important design; and continued in that flourishing condition for a considerable time after. Now this circumstance did (as it was reasonable to expect it should) contribute much towards smoothing the progress of the Gospel, and opening an easier way for its reception, while so large a part of the earth, through the wise Providence of God, was brought under one government; while a communication between many countries was by these means kept open, and a continual correspondence thus maintain'd between very distant nations. It seems to be owing to something more than merely his own ambition, that Julius Cæsar was induced to extend his conquests as far as our
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British islands, which then sat in darkness, and stand upon record as being at that time a barbarous inhospitable people: For by these means they who laboured in the work of the ministry, had a freer and more open access to the several parts of the then known world, and could act with the greater ease and uniformity in their respective commissions. Again,

SIXTHLY, As our Saviour was to be the descendant of a king, and of the lineage of David; but as he could not compleat the great end of his coming, without disclaiming all secular dominion, he probably chose to appear in the world at the time he did, because at that time there was the least room to suspect him of serving his designs by any pretensions to earthly power and grandeur: The royal family he drew his descent from being then at its very lowest ebb, and lying undistinguished with the lowest of mankind. And we have the more reason for thinking so, because, during the three years of his ministry, as Messiah, he always chose to speak of his kingdom, as often as he had occasion to mention it, in remote and figurative expressions. And when in private conversation with his disciples, he gave more open intimations

mations of his being the king of the Jews, he charged them not to tell it abroad. It is true in the concluding scene of his life, he declared publickly before Pilate, that he was a King; as in right he was. But then, to prevent any misuse, or misconstruction of his meaning, he declared at the same time, that his *kingdom* was *not of this world*, as in fact it was not.

The SEVENTH, and last thing that I shall mention as a probable reason of our Saviour's appearing at the time he did is this: That being to make an atonement for sin by the sacrifice of himself, and to this end, being to be betrayed into the hands of wicked men, who should put him to death, the time which he appeared in might be the first, or at least the fittest season for effecting this, so as to answer all the purposes intended by it.

In any other age even the Jews themselves might not be so perversely bigotted as to shut their eyes against so much light, and reject so great a weight of evidence, as the doctrines, miracles, and life of our blessed Saviour carried with them and set forth to their view; if there had been a Pilate, that
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would have condemned him, there might not have been a Judas to have betrayed him: All the circumstances that were necessary towards the completion of this great plan might not have concurred so effectually at any other particular juncture.

This argument it is true will not be allowed by such as maintain that God does not only foresee the sinful actions of men, but also determines them to such actions. But upon this supposition, which is surely a very strange one, God might in any age or nation have irresistibly determined some persons, nay any person, to *crucify the Lord of glory*. But if we believe, as in reason we ought, that our sins are the effects of our own free choice, and not of any secret determination or irresistible decree of God, then may there, I presume, be good reason to suppose that probably the son of God could not have appeared at any other time so agreeably to his great design, of becoming a sacrifice for the sins of the world, as at the time he did.

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